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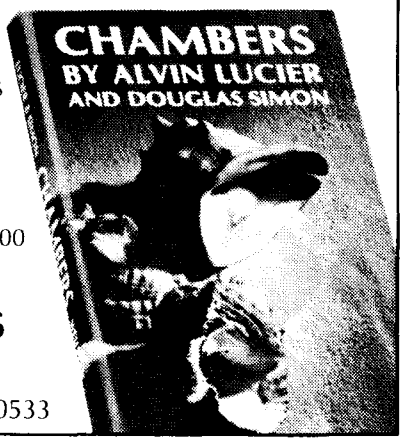

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NOTES

LAWRENCE GRAVER teaches English at Williams College. He has just been awarded a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities to finish a critical book on Beckett. . . . Now teaching at New York University, **DENIS DONOGHUE** is the author of *The Sovereign Ghosts: Studies in Imagination*. . . . **PETER BROOKS** teaches in the department of comparative literature at Yale University. . . . **EDITH KURZWEIL** is the author of *The Age of Structuralism: Lévi-Strauss to Foucault*. . . . **DONALD MARSHALL** teaches English and comparative literature at the University of Iowa and has just finished a sabbatical leave in Paris, studying literary theory and its history. . . . Professor of American studies and English at Yale University, **ALAN TRACHTENBERG**'s book, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age*, will appear in the coming year. . . . **ROGER SHATTUCK**'s latest book is *The Forbidden Experiment: The Story of the Wild Boy of Aveyron*. . . . **PAUL DELANY** teaches English at Simon Fraser University. . . . Professor of American studies at Cornell University, **CUSHING STROUT**'s *The Veracious Imagination: Essays on American History, Literature, and Biography* will be published this fall. . . . **EMIR RODRÍGUEZ MONEGAL** teaches Latin American literature at Yale University. . . . **PERRY MEISEL** is the author of *The Absent Father: Virginia Woolf and Walter Pater* and *Thomas Hardy: The Return of the Repressed*. . . . Assistant professor of English at the University of Alabama, **GREG JAY** recently completed a draft of a book on T.S. Eliot's poetics. . . . **RONALD CHRIST** works with psychiatric prison and civilian patients at Bellevue Hospital Center in a writing program that he originated. . . . **JULIA PREWITT BROWN** teaches English at Boston University and is the author of *Jane Austen's Novels: Social Change and Literary Form*.

Editor's Notes: We were not able to publish Steven Marcus's comments on William Phillips's paper in this issue. They will appear in a future issue.

The book review by Mario Vargas Llosa in the last issue (Number 2, 1980) was translated by Ronald Christ.

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Comment

THE WORLD ACCORDING TO NORMAN

1. Norman

Radical belief has often been likened to religious faith. But religious conversion usually comes later in life, and there are fewer deconversions. Rarely is a shedding of belief dramatic or followed by a violent swing to the extremes of disbelief. Yet the political history of American and European intellectuals, particularly since the thirties, consists largely of youthful conversions to some form of radicalism and subsequent disillusion, frequently involving a shift to strong antiradical views. Many of us who broke with the communists in the thirties and have tried since then to maintain our political balance have watched with dismay and sadness how many of our friends and colleagues have somersaulted into the camp of the conservatives. Neoconservatism, the most recent movement to the right, has become the euphemism for a variety of former radicals and latecomers who have moved to positions ranging from mild conservatism to total reaction.

One of the recent swingers is Norman Podhoretz, editor of *Commentary*, who was mildly left through the sixties, then gradually reversed himself, and now is a leading figure in the neoconservative fraternity. Podhoretz's account of his intellectual history in his political memoir, *Breaking Ranks*, which was intended to explain and justify his political shifts, does not make them more acceptable or attractive. Unfortunately, he justifies more than he explains. The drift of his argument in defense of his present position is that he has come to see not only Russia, but the entire left as a threat to America and to all civilized values, which seem to be identical.

Now there would be little disagreement and no need for high-powered polemics if all Podhoretz were saying was that in the present situation America is better than Russia and worth defending or that a part of the liberal left supports backward and dictatorial regimes and

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movements—in the name of humanity and progress. Only overeducated fools or left-wing propagandists deny these things. But this is not all that Podhoretz is arguing. On the contrary, despite all his professions of liberalism, he has swung so far to the right that many of his views and those of *Commentary* are indistinguishable from those of the *National Review*. One cannot recognize the young Podhoretz, the exuberant, fun-loving, quizzical, dissident, wildly curious, adventurous, skeptical Podhoretz in his earnest advocacy of the staples of the American myth: the family, marriage, middle-class mores, ambition, success, business, the average American, and, above all, the system, the best of all possible systems. It is true that it is fashionable in some circles to deride the family, marriage, the work ethic, or the moral imperatives that hold society together. But the piety with which Podhoretz recites the virtues or the ideals of American life adds little to our sense of its complexities and its problems, and sounds sometimes like the middle-class sermons in the newspaper columns advising people how to live and love. To round out his position, Podhoretz is against alienation, the Beats, Bohemians, hippies, affirmative action, the women's movement, homosexuals, abortion. To be sure, there is no lack of nonsense on the political and cultural left, but idealizing the norms of respectability is scarcely an attractive or viable alternative—or one that solves anything.

So rosy is Podhoretz's picture of America, that one would never suspect there is a considerable loss of vitality and ability to cope with the problems of modern existence. That our system is an arena of savagely competing interests is not evident in Podhoretz's scheme of things. Nor that we have no coherent foreign policy; that urban life is out of control; that our economy is running away from us; that the country is enveloped in a combination of patriotism and fear that American power is on the wane. One of the troubles with conservative ideologies is that they do not recognize political reality. They simply try to overpower it with rhetoric about our political and military might.

Such is Podhoretz's credo at present. But even that could be respected as an honest difference of opinion about the state of the world if his account of his political development were less self-righteous and more balanced. Thus he seems always to have been right, always "ahead of his time." When he was a radical, it was because of the failings of American society. As for Vietnam, he was against it from the beginning. Unlike those bandwagon intellectuals who rode the tides of opinion, he claims his opposition on political

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not on moral grounds was unique. He was anti-Stalinist early on, though he did think some anti-Stalinists went too far—as they did. In the end, he came to see how most liberal intellectuals betrayed their country, their civilization, their liberal faith. He rationalizes his shifts into a steady course of thinking by claiming that he was always against "liberal orthodoxy," against "established liberal wisdom," at first from the left, more recently from the right. Hence he was always breaking ranks. Unfortunately, this picture of intellectual heroism does not always correspond to the facts and involves a certain amount of self-inflation. His anti-Stalinism was indistinguishable from the politics of the community he grew up in—as was his early attempt to hold on to a radical position in conjunction with his anti-Stalinism. In the sixties he fell for the politics of the new left, more than most of us did, though in his latter phase he accuses some of us of having succumbed to it. His feelings about Vietnam were not as unique as he likes to think they were. Nor is his latest turn toward conservatism either distinctive or unpopular. Being out of step with one group meant being in step with another.

Further, Podhoretz's defense of his own shifting views is weakened by his misrepresentation of the views of those who have not always agreed with him. Thus he singles out Norman Mailer, Lionel Trilling, Irving Howe, and myself as betrayers of the anticommunist faith. All of us, according to Podhoretz, acted out of fear, fear of criticism by the left, though he also says Howe has a religious streak. The evidence appears to consist of our unwillingness to take the extreme positions occupied by Podhoretz and his fellow neoconservatives. It does not seem to have occurred to him that Trilling was drawn to modulated views; he shunned extreme and shrill ones. Or that Howe has his own mind, and has always tried to maintain an anticommunist politics within a radical perspective. Mailer is Mailer, and he cannot be defined by the usual left-right, communist-anticommunist categories. As for myself, Podhoretz has a small point, but a distorted one. It is true that I have had some fears, but they have been fears not of criticism by the left, but of being boxed out by ideological commitments from a relation to the contemporary scene—a fear, one might say, of living in some imaginary idyllic past or in some futuristic dream. Podhoretz also manipulates the facts when he says I gave in to the counterculture. How did I give in?—by publishing Susan Sontag, Richard Poirier, and Morris Dickstein. One would never suspect from Podhoretz's polemical portrait of me that I have been accused of being too anticommunist, as well as a cultural

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"elitist," particularly since I have been critical of the contempt for quality and standards rampant these days.

I would like to add one personal note. Podhoretz says he could not understand and cannot remember what I said to him about *Making It*. I said that his critics were inflating its faults into a criminal act. But I also said the book was off key in that it made ambition and the drive for success the whole story. I thought he took literally Philip Rahv's diatribes and exposés of the grubby motives of his fellow intellectuals. Rahv was a Marxist in his use of psychology: he used Marxism to demystify human behavior and reduce it to its simplest and lowest components. And I said Podhoretz's so-called "family" was driven more by literary and intellectual ambitions than by the desire to "make it." Hence *Making It* had the wrong emphasis and tone. In the same way *Breaking Ranks* has the wrong tone. It is too full of speculations and revelations of people's motives and of their greedy push to get ahead, and too comfortable with its discovery of the benign effects of the worship of success in this country.

Sometimes I feel that Podhoretz has been created by the left. His almost ritualistic conservatism is a response to the foolishness and irresponsibility of the left—and presumably is justified by it. The raison d'être of Podhoretz's antiradical polemics would disappear if left-liberals did not feed him with their illusions about Soviet communism, the Third World, or the P.L.O.

Too bad. But events are so unpredictable that Norman and I might some day find ourselves on the same side again. Who knows? Norman may move left, or I may move right. In the meantime, I can only be saddened by the gap between me and one of the two younger writers, Steven Marcus and Norman Podhoretz, I have been closest to. In the past, some of my best pieces were written for *Commentary*, and actually solicited and encouraged by Norman. And when Norman had to make a decision years ago whether to become editor of *Commentary* or go into academic life, he told me I was one of the few who supported his decision to stay at *Commentary*. Many people, including Lionel Trilling, according to Norman, advised him against it. Now my feelings are mixed up. I am more sentimental and nostalgic than I usually admit, and my ideas and principles are constantly in conflict with my feelings. To complicate things further, there is a basic contradiction between my commitment to change and my dread of it. For one who believes in the necessities of history, I must confess I am psychologically drawn to the stability that exists only outside of history.

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2. The World

The recent invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union has not only startled established opinion into a reconsideration of the idea of détente with Russia and of American foreign policy as a whole, but it has also bolstered the position of the neoconservatives and given a certain amount of credibility to their strong anti-Soviet and antiradical stand. Many liberals who spend their lives wobbling between radical and conservative views have been leaning toward the tough talk of the neoconservatives, which combines an appeal to patriotism, to self-esteem (standing up to the Russians), with the ideals of freedom and human rights, and with the seductive logic of realpolitik. It is an almost irresistible appeal, until one begins to examine its political content and strategies—most of which boil down to the old rhetorical bluster about using American military and political power. When it comes down to the question of how to use that power effectively all we get is an increase in the military budget and a warning not to trust the Russians.

In my opinion, neither Podhoretz nor the other neoconservatives address the real problems and difficulties that have so far stymied American foreign policy. For one thing, it is certainly no secret that America does not have a foreign policy: what goes under that name is a succession of ad hoc, contradictory, shifting moves. There is no enduring and clear cut estimate of Russian power or intentions, or for that matter, of any other country, whether friendly, neutral, or hostile. Nor is there any accepted idea of the national interest, beyond the assumption that Europe, and maybe Israel, are to be defended.

There are many reasons for this weird mixture of empiricism and anarchism in our handling of foreign affairs. But the main one is that America is made up of such a conflicting mélange of interests that it is almost impossible to get a consensus except in time of war. Big business wants maximum profits and low taxes, small business worries about its own ledgers, and both are more interested in carrying on as usual than in gearing themselves to a long term policy that may not be economically advantageous to them in the short run. Labor wants higher wages, even at the cost of losing out to foreign industry on the world market. Politicians have to satisfy their constituency at home with a piece of the pork barrel. The minorities want more. The ecologists want to curb big business. Big business is against both. And so on. And how do the conservatives propose to cope with these obstacles? The truth is that they have no program for

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consolidating or overriding these powerful forces generated out of self-interest. In fact, the neoconservatives never challenge the very system of self-aggrandizement that is unable to generate a consistent and rational foreign policy.

But there are other, serious difficulties to which the neoconservatives do not have an answer—and the nature of their position precludes an answer. Even if we assume their basic premise—and it may be correct—that the survival of American and of Western democracy depends on thwarting Russian or communist expansion in Africa and Asia, as well as in Europe, they have no means for solving the political problems inherent in such a policy. Again, the difficulties lie within the American system and way of thinking, to which the neoconservatives are committed. Iran presents a typical example of what America is up against. If we back regimes like that of the Shah, we are put in the position of supporting a government that cannot withstand popular revolt, whether with or without communist military or political assistance, unless we are prepared for all out military and political intervention. On the other hand, we cannot ally ourselves with radical movements, hoping they will be anticommunist and pro-American. For one thing, they do not trust us. But more important is that we carry with us the ideology of a business civilization, while the Russians supply indigenous forces of revolt with a revolutionary ideology and a corps of organizers. Thus we could not keep the Shah in power, and we are thought of as an enemy by the new government. A country like Saudi Arabia, to take another example, is unstable and vulnerable to communist manipulations and Arab fervor enlisted in overthrowing rightist regimes. Even Egypt, whose interests lie with America and Israel, has to keep one eye on the Soviet exploitation of Arab discontent.

Nor is domestic policy free of the same contradictions as foreign policy, and the two are not disconnected. For the loss of American power and prestige, which the neoconservatives decry, is also due to the inflation, about which nothing is being done, and the energy crisis, which is being solved by inertia. Here, too, the neoconservatives have no solution. Nor can they have one, for they tacitly acquiesce in the social mores that prevent a rational solution. For clearly it is the greed of big business and the complicity of politicians that are preventing the control of inflation and a curb on the use of oil—not to mention that the inflation increases the government's tax revenues.

Norman Podhoretz, in a piece in *Commentary* on "The Present Danger," pulls no punches in criticizing politicians of both parties as

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well as political intellectuals for underestimating the Soviet threat. But, assuming that he is right in his indictment, all he has to offer—as a spokesman for the neoconservatives—is an appeal to stiffen the national backbone. He is pessimistic about America's ability to resist what he sees as "Finlandization"—the analogy limps because Finland's impotence is due to its being a tiny country on Russia's border—but he finds some hope in the recent surge of patriotism and national pride. To be sure, national self-esteem is salutary under some circumstances, such as the French resistance to German occupation or that of the countries in Eastern Europe to Russian domination. But the American problem is not a scarcity of patriotism but an excess of greed, and an economy based on greed creates a morality and a politics based on greed, which soon spreads to all sections of the population where it takes the form of the relentless pursuit of individual self-interest and immediate gratification. The profit principle is translated into the pleasure principle.

In this social climate, I suspect that the neoconservative pep talks to strengthen the nation will succeed only in spending sprees on armaments. Perhaps in the absence of a foreign policy and the political means of implementing it, that is all that can be done. But things would be clearer if it were recognized that Podhoretz and his fellow neoconservatives were accepting the very business mentality that produces our political paralysis, and that they are relying almost entirely on the threat of a nuclear war to halt Soviet expansion or the spread of its political influence. And that depends on our willingness to risk the consequences of a Soviet strike, or on the gamble that the Russian leaders are too sensible to take the chance that we would attack them.

I am not suggesting that liberals or the left have any better solution. In fact, most liberals and radicals do not even admit the existence of the problem, at least in the terms we have been discussing it, in terms, that is, of the ability of America to cope with growing Soviet power and its manipulation of nationalist movements in Asia and Africa. Many people of good will still think that moral and restrained behavior on our part will act as a model for the rest of the world, including the Russians. There are, of course, knowledgeable liberals like Stanley Hoffman, who advocates a sophisticated use of politics in the Persian Gulf and other critical areas. But he leaves unanswered the question of how a country steeped in the ideology of private enterprise, that atomizes us into competing units of self-interest, can pursue a radical political policy abroad or can ally itself

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with nationalist movements—movements that are born out of the myths as well as the realities of liberation and opposition to American capitalism.

Such are the dilemmas of American politics, which the neoconservatives are unable to resolve. But I suppose we should be grateful to Norman Podhoretz for reminding us that conservative illusions are no better than liberal or radical ones.

W.P.

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Vladimir Nabokov

FRANZ KAFKA (1883–1924)

Of course, no matter how keenly, how admirably, a story, a piece of music, a picture is discussed and analyzed, there will be minds that remain blank and spines that remain unkindled. "To take upon us the mystery of things"—what King Lear so wistfully says for himself and for Cordelia—this is also my suggestion for everyone who takes art seriously. A poor man is robbed of his overcoat (Gogol's "The Greatcoat," or more correctly "The Carrick"); another poor fellow is turned into a beetle (Kafka's "The Metamorphosis")—so what? There is no rational answer to "so what." We can take the story apart, we can find out how the bits fit, how one part of the pattern responds to the other; but you have to have in you some cell, some gene, some germ that will vibrate in answer to sensations that you can neither define, nor dismiss. *Beauty plus pity*—that is the closest we can get to a definition of art. Where there is beauty there is pity for the simple reason that beauty must die: beauty always dies, the manner dies with the matter, the world dies with the individual. If Kafka's "The Metamorphosis" strikes anyone as something more than an entomological fantasy, then I congratulate him on having joined the ranks of good and great readers.

I want to discuss fantasy and reality, and their mutual relationship. If we consider the "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" story as an allegory—the struggle between Good and Evil within every man—then this allegory is tasteless and childish. To the type of mind that would see an allegory here, its shadow play would also postulate physical happenings which common sense knows to be impossible; but actually in the setting of the story, as viewed by a commonsensical mind,

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nothing at first sight seems to run counter to general human experience. I want to suggest, however, that a second look shows that the setting of the story does run counter to general human experience, and that Utterson and the other men around Jekyll are, in a sense, as fantastic as Mr. Hyde. Unless we see them in a fantastic light, there is no enchantment. And if the enchanter leaves and the storyteller and the teacher remain alone together, they make poor company.

The story of Jekyll and Hyde is beautifully constructed, but it is an old one. Its moral is preposterous since neither good nor evil is actually depicted: on the whole, they are taken for granted, and the struggle goes on between two empty outlines. The enchantment lies in the art of Stevenson's fancywork; but I want to suggest that since art and thought, manner and matter, are inseparable, there must be something of the same kind about the structure of the story, too. Let us be cautious, however. I still think that there is a flaw in the artistic realization of the story—if we consider form and content separately—a flaw which is missing in Gogol's "The Carrick" and in Kafka's "The Metamorphosis." The fantastic side of the setting—Utterson, Enfield, Poole, Lanyon, and their London—is not of the same quality as the fantastic side of Jekyll's hydization. There is a crack in the picture, a lack of unity.

"The Carrick," "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," and "The Metamorphosis": all three are commonly called fantasies. From my point of view, any outstanding work of art is a fantasy insofar as it reflects the unique world of a unique individual. But when people call these three stories fantasies, they merely imply that the stories depart in their subject matter from what is commonly called reality. Let us therefore examine what *reality* is, in order to discover in what manner and to what extent so-called fantasies depart from so-called reality.

Let us take three types of men walking through the same landscape. Number One is a city man on a well-deserved vacation. Number Two is a professional botanist. Number Three is a local farmer. Number One, the city man, is what is called a realistic, commonsensical, matter-of-fact type: he sees trees as *trees* and knows from his map that the road he is following is a nice new road leading to Newton, where there is a nice eating place recommended to him by a friend in his office. The botanist looks around and sees his environment in the very exact terms of plant life, precise biological and classified units such as specific trees and grasses, flowers and ferns, and for him *this* is reality; to him the world of the stolid tourist (who cannot distinguish an oak from an elm) seems a fantastic, vague, dreamy, never-never

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world. Finally, the world of the local farmer differs from the two others in that his world is intensely emotional and personal since he has been born and bred there, and knows every trail and individual tree, and every shadow from every tree across every trail, all in warm connection with his everyday work, and his childhood, and a thousand small things and patterns which the other two—the humdrum tourist and the botanical taxonomist—simply cannot know in the given place at the given time. Our farmer will not know the relation of the surrounding vegetation to a botanical conception of the world, and the botanist will know nothing of any importance to him about that barn or that old field or that old house under its cottonwoods, which are afloat, as it were, in a medium of personal memories for one who was born there.

So here we have three different worlds—three men, ordinary men who have different *realities*—and, of course, we could bring in a number of other beings: a blind man with a dog, a hunter with a dog, a dog with his man, a painter cruising in quest of a sunset, a girl out of gas——In every case it would be a world completely different from the rest since the most objective words *tree, road, flower, sky, barn, thumb, rain* have, in each, totally different subjective connotations. Indeed, this subjective life is so strong that it makes an empty and broken shell of the so-called objective existence. The only way back to objective reality is the following one: we can take these several individual worlds, mix them thoroughly together, scoop up a drop of that mixture, and call it *objective reality*. We may taste in it a particle of madness if a lunatic passed through that locality, or a particle of complete and beautiful nonsense if a man has been looking at a lovely field and imagining upon it a lovely factory producing buttons or bombs; but on the whole these mad particles would be diluted in the drop of objective reality that we hold up to the light in our test tube. Moreover, this *objective reality* will contain something that transcends optical illusions and laboratory tests. It will have elements of poetry, of lofty emotion, of energy and endeavor (and even here the button king may find his rightful place), of pity, pride, passion—and the craving for a thick steak at the recommended roadside eating place.

So when we say *reality*, we are really thinking of all this—in one drop—an average sample of a mixture of a million individual realities. And it is in this sense (of human reality) that I use the term *reality* when placing it against a backdrop, such as the worlds of "The Carrick," "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," and "The Metamorphosis," which are specific fantasies.

In "The Carrick" and in "The Metamorphosis" there is a central

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figure endowed with a certain amount of human pathos among grotesque, heartless characters, figures of fun or figures of horror, asses parading as zebras, or hybrids between rabbits and rats. In "The Carrick" the human quality of the central figure is of a different type from Gregor in Kafka's story, but this human pathetic quality is present in both. In "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" there is no such human pathos, no throb in the throat of the story, none of that intonation of "'I cannot get out, I cannot get out,' said the starling" (so heartrending in Sterne's fantasy *A Sentimental Journey*). True, Stevenson devotes many pages to the horror of Jekyll's plight, but the thing, after all, is only a superb Punch-and-Judy show. The beauty of Kafka's and Gogol's private nightmares is that their central human characters belong to the same private fantastic world as the inhuman characters around them, but the central one tries to get out of that world, to cast off the mask, to transcend the cloak or the carapace. But in Stevenson's story there is none of that unity and none of that contrast. The Uttersons, and Pooles, and Enfields are meant to be commonplace everyday characters; actually they are characters derived from Dickens, and thus they constitute phantasms that do not quite belong to Stevenson's own artistic reality, just as Stevenson's fog comes from a Dickensian studio to envelop a conventional London. I suggest, in fact, that Jekyll's magic drug is more real than Utterson's life. The fantastic Jekyll-and-Hyde theme, on the other hand, is supposed to be in contrast to this conventional London, but it is really the difference between a Gothic medieval theme and a Dickensian one. It is not the same kind of difference as that between an absurd world and pathetically absurd Bashmachkin, or between an absurd world and tragically absurd Gregor.

The Jekyll-and-Hyde theme does not quite form a unity with its setting because its fantasy is of a different type from the fantasy of the setting. There is really nothing especially pathetic or tragic about Jekyll. We enjoy every detail of the marvellous juggling, of the beautiful trick, but there is no artistic emotional throb involved, and whether it is Jekyll or Hyde who gets the upper hand remains of supreme indifference to the good reader. I am speaking of rather nice distinctions, and it is difficult to put them in simple form. When a certain clear-thinking but somewhat superficial French philosopher asked the profound but obscure German philosopher Hegel to state his views in a concise form, Hegel answered him harshly, "These things can be discussed neither concisely nor in French." We shall ignore the question whether Hegel was right or not, and still try to put into a

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nutshell the difference between the Gogol-Kafka kind of story and Stevenson's kind.

In Gogol and Kafka the absurd central character belongs to the absurd world around him but, pathetically and tragically, attempts to struggle out of it into the world of humans—and dies in despair. In Stevenson the unreal central character belongs to a brand of unreality different from that of the world around him. He is a Gothic character in a Dickensian setting, and when he struggles and then dies, his fate possesses only conventional pathos. I do not at all mean that Stevenson's story is a failure. No, it is a minor masterpiece in its own conventional terms, but it has only two dimensions, whereas the Gogol-Kafka stories have five or six.

Born in 1883, Franz Kafka came from a German-speaking Jewish family in Prague, Czechoslovakia. He is the greatest German writer of our time. Such poets as Rilke or such novelists as Thomas Mann are dwarfs or plaster saints in comparison to him. He read for law at the German university in Prague and from 1908 on he worked as a petty clerk, a small employee, in a very Gogolian office for an insurance company. Hardly any of his now famous works, such as his novels *The Trial* (1925) and *The Castle* (1926), were published in his lifetime. His greatest short story "The Metamorphosis," in German "Die Verwandlung," was written in the fall of 1912 and published in Leipzig in October 1915. In 1917 he coughed blood, and the rest of his life, a period of seven years, was punctuated by sojourns in central European sanatoriums. In those last years of his short life (he died at the age of 41), he had a happy love affair and lived with his mistress in Berlin, in 1923, not far from me. In the spring of 1924 he went to a sanatorium near Vienna where he died on 3 June, of tuberculosis of the larynx. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Prague. He asked his friend Max Brod to burn everything he had written, even published material. Fortunately Brod did not comply with his friend's wish.

Before starting to talk of "The Metamorphosis," I want to dismiss two points of view. I want to dismiss completely Max Brod's opinion that the category of sainthood, not that of literature, is the only one that can be applied to the understanding of Kafka's writings. Kafka was first of all an artist, and although it may be maintained that every artist is a manner of saint (I feel that very clearly myself), I do not think that any religious implications can be read into Kafka's genius. The other matter that I want to dismiss is the Freudian point of view. His

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Freudian biographers, like Neider in *The Frozen Sea* (1948), contend, for example, that "The Metamorphosis" has a basis in Kafka's complex relationship with his father and his lifelong sense of guilt; they contend further that in mythical symbolism children are represented by vermin—which I doubt—and then go on to say that Kafka uses the symbol of the bug to represent the son according to these Freudian postulates. The bug, they say, aptly characterizes his sense of worthlessness before his father. I am interested here in bugs, not in humbugs, and I reject this nonsense. Kafka himself was extremely critical of Freudian ideas. He considered psychoanalysis (I quote) "a helpless error," and he regarded Freud's theories as very approximate, very rough pictures, which did not do justice to details or, what is more, to the essence of the matter. This is another reason why I should like to dismiss the Freudian approach and concentrate, instead, upon the artistic moment.

The greatest literary influence upon Kafka was Flaubert's. Flaubert who loathed pretty-pretty prose would have applauded Kafka's attitude towards his tool. Kafka liked to draw his terms from the language of law and science, giving them a kind of ironic precision, with no intrusion of the author's private sentiments; this was exactly Flaubert's method through which he achieved a singular poetic effect.

The hero of "The Metamorphosis" is Gregor Samsa (pronounced *Zamza*), who is the son of middle-class parents in Prague, Flaubertian philistines, people interested only in the material side of life and vulgarians in their tastes. Some five years before, old Samsa lost most of his money, whereupon his son Gregor took a job with one of his father's creditors and became a traveling salesman in cloth. His father then stopped working altogether, his sister Grete was too young to work, his mother was ill with asthma; thus young Gregor not only supported the whole family but also found for them the apartment they are now living in. This apartment, a flat in an apartment house, in Charlotte Street to be exact, is divided into segments as he will be divided himself. We are in Prague, central Europe, in the year 1912; servants are cheap so that the Samsas can afford a servant maid, Anna, aged sixteen (one year younger than Grete), and a cook. Gregor is mostly away traveling, but when the story starts he is spending a night at home between two business trips, and it is then that the dreadful thing happened. "As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from a troubled dream he found himself transformed in his bed into a monstrous insect. He was lying on his hard, as it were armor-plated, back and when he lifted his head a little he could see his dome-like brown belly divided into corrugated segments on top of which the bed

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quilt could hardly keep in position and was about to slide off completely. His numerous legs, which were pitifully thin compared to the rest of his bulk, flimmered [*flicker* + *shimmer*] helplessly before his eyes.

"What has happened to me? he thought. It was no dream. . . .

"Gregor's eyes turned next to the window—one could hear rain drops beating on the tin of the windowsill's outer edge and the dull weather made him quite melancholy. What about sleeping a little longer and forgetting all this nonsense, he thought, but it could not be done, for he was accustomed to sleep on his right side and in his present condition he could not turn himself over. However violently he tried to hurl himself on his right side he always swung back to the supine position. He tried it at least a hundred times, shutting his eyes * to keep from seeing his wriggly legs, and only desisted when he began to feel in his side a faint dull ache he had never experienced before.

"Ach Gott, he thought, what an exhausting job I've picked on! Traveling about day in, day out. Many more anxieties on the road than in the office, the plague of worrying about train connections, the bad and irregular meals, casual acquaintances never to be seen again, never to become intimate friends. The hell with it all! He felt a slight itching on the skin of his belly; slowly pushed himself on his back nearer the top of the bed so that he could lift his head more easily; identified the itching place which was covered with small white dots the nature of which he could not understand and tried to touch it with a leg, but drew the leg back immediately, for the contact made a cold shiver run through him."

Now what exactly is the "vermin" into which poor Gregor, the seedy commercial traveler, is so suddenly transformed? It obviously belongs to the branch of "jointed leggers" *(Arthropoda)*, to which insects, and spiders, and centipedes, and crustaceans belong. If the "numerous little legs" mentioned in the beginning mean more than six legs, then Gregor would not be an insect from a zoological point of view. But I suggest that a man awakening on his back and finding he has as many as six legs vibrating in the air might feel that six was sufficient to be called numerous. We shall therefore assume that Gregor has six legs, that he is an insect.

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*VN's note in his annotated copy: "A regular beetle has no eyelids and cannot close its eyes—a beetle with human eyes." About the passage in general he has the note: "In the original German there is a wonderful flowing rhythm here in this dreamy sequence of sentences. He is half-awake—he realizes his plight without surprise, with a childish acceptance of it, and at the same time he still clings to human memories, human experience. The metamorphosis is not quite complete as yet." Ed.

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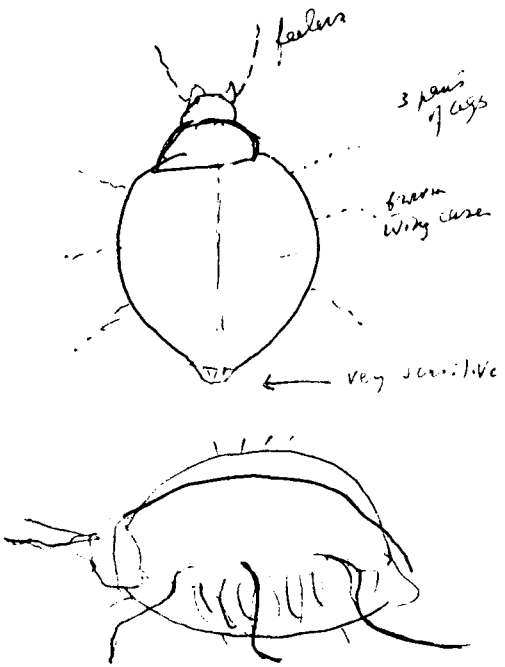
Next question: what insect? Commentators say *cockroach*, which of course does not make sense. A cockroach is an insect that is flat in shape with large legs, and Gregor is anything but flat: he is convex on both sides, belly and back, and his legs are small. He approaches a cockroach in only one respect: his coloration is brown. That is all. Apart from this he has a tremendous convex belly divided into segments and a hard rounded back suggestive of wing cases. In beetles these cases conceal flimsy little wings that can be expanded and then may carry the beetle for miles and miles in a blundering flight. Curiously enough, Gregor the beetle never found out that he had wings under the hard covering of his back. (This is a very nice observation on my part to be treasured all your lives. Some Gregors, some Joes and Janes, do not know that they have wings.) Further, he has strong mandibles. He uses these organs to turn the key in a lock while standing erect on his hind legs, on his third pair of legs (a strong little pair), and this gives us the length of his body, which is about three feet long. In the course of the story he gets gradually accustomed to using his new appendages—his feet, his feelers. This brown, convex, dog-sized beetle is very broad. I should imagine him to look like this:



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In the original German text the old charwoman calls him *Mistkäfer*, a "dung beetle." It is obvious that the good woman is adding the epithet only to be friendly. He is not, technically, a dung beetle. He is merely a big beetle. (I must add that neither Gregor nor Kafka saw that beetle any too clearly.)

Let us look closer at the transformation. The change, though shocking and striking, is not quite so odd as might be assumed at first glance. A commonsensical commentator (Paul L. Landsberg in *The Kafka Problem*, 1946, ed. Angel Flores) notes that "When we go to bed in unfamiliar surroundings, we are apt to have a moment of bewilderment upon awakening, a sudden sense of unreality, and this experience must occur over and over again in the life of a commercial traveller, a manner of living that renders impossible any sense of continuity." The sense of reality depends upon continuity, upon duration. After all, awakening as an insect is not much different from awakening as Napoleon or George Washington. (I knew a man who awoke as the Emperor of Brazil.) On the other hand, the isolation, and the strangeness, of so-called reality—this is, after all, something which constantly characterizes the artist, the genius, the discoverer. The Samsa family around the fantastic insect is nothing else than mediocrity surrounding genius.

PART ONE

I am now going to speak of structure. Part one of the story can be divided into seven scenes or segments:

Scene I: Gregor wakes up. He is alone. He has already been changed into a beetle, but his human impressions still mingle with his new insect instincts. The scene ends with the introduction of the still human time element.

"He looked at the alarm clock ticking on the chest. Good Lord! he thought. It was half-past six and the hands were quietly moving on, it was even past the half-hour, it was getting on toward a quarter to seven. Had the alarm clock not gone off? . . . The next train went at seven o'clock; to catch that he would need to hurry like mad and his samples weren't even packed up, and he himself wasn't feeling particularly fresh and active. And even if he did catch the train he wouldn't

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avoid a row with the boss, since the firm's messenger would have been waiting for the five o'clock train and would have long since reported his failure to turn up." He thinks of reporting that he is sick, but concludes that the insurance doctor would certify him as perfectly healthy. "And would he be so far wrong on this occasion? Gregor really felt quite well, apart from a drowsiness that was utterly superfluous after such a long sleep, and he was even unusually hungry."

Scene II: The three members of the family knock on his doors and talk to him from, respectively, the hallway, the living room, and his sister's room. Gregor's family are his parasites, exploiting him, eating him out from the inside. This is his beetle itch in human terms. The pathetic urge to find some protection from betrayal, cruelty, and filth is the factor that went to form his carapace, his beetle shell, which at first seems hard and secure but eventually is seen to be as vulnerable as his sick human flesh and spirit had been. Who of the three parasites—father, mother, sister—is the most cruel? At first it would seem to be the father. But he is not the worst: it is the sister, whom Gregor loves most but who betrays him beginning with the furniture scene in the middle of the story. In the second scene the door theme begins: "there came a cautious tap at the door behind the head of his bed. 'Gregor,' said a voice—it was his mother's—'it's a quarter to seven. Hadn't you a train to catch?' That gentle voice! Gregor had a shock as he heard his own voice answering hers, unmistakably his own voice, it was true, but with a persistent pitiful squeaky undertone. . . . 'Yes, yes, thank you, Mother, I'm getting up now.' The wooden door between them must have kept the change in his voice from being noticeable outside. . . . Yet this brief exchange of words had made the other members of the family aware that Gregor was still in the house, as they had not expected, and at one of the side doors his father was already knocking gently, yet with his fist. 'Gregor, Gregor,' he called, 'what's the matter with you?' And after a while he called again in a deeper voice: 'Gregor! Gregor!' At the other side door his sister was saying in a low, plaintive tone: 'Gregor? Aren't you well? Do you need anything?' He answered them both at once: 'I'm just ready,' and did his best to make his voice sound as normal as possible by enunciating the words very clearly and leaving long pauses between them. So his father went back to his breakfast, but his sister whispered: 'Gregor, open the door, do.' However, he was not thinking of opening the door, and felt thankful for the prudent habit he had acquired in traveling of locking all doors during the night, even at home."

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Scene III: The getting out of bed ordeal in which man plans but beetle acts. Gregor still thinks of his body in human terms, but now a human's lower part is a beetle's hind part, a human's upper part is a beetle's fore part. A man on all fours seems to him to correspond to a beetle on all sixes. He does not quite yet understand this and will persistently try to stand up on his third pair of legs. "He thought that he might get out of bed with the lower part of his body first, but this lower part, which he had not yet seen and of which he could form no clear conception, proved too difficult to move; it was all so slow; and when at last almost savagely he gathered his forces together and thrust out recklessly, he had miscalculated the direction and bumped heavily against the lower end of the bed, and the burning pain he felt taught him that it was the lower part of his body that probably for the time being was the most sensitive. . . . But then he said to himself: 'Before it strikes a quarter past seven I must be quite out of this bed, without fail. Anyhow, by that time someone will have come from the office to ask what is the matter with me, since it opens before seven.' And he set himself to rocking his whole body at once in a regular series of jolts, with the idea of swinging it out of the bed. If he tipped himself out in that way he could keep his head from injury by lifting it at an acute angle when he fell. His back seemed to be hard and was not likely to suffer from a fall on the carpet. His biggest worry was the loud crash he would not be able to help making, which would probably cause anxiety, if not terror, behind all the doors. Still, he must take the risk. . . . Well, ignoring the fact that the doors were all locked, ought he really to call for help? In spite of his misery he could not suppress a smile at the very idea of it."

Scene IV: He is still struggling when the family theme, or the theme of the many doors, takes over again, and in the course of this scene he falls out of bed at last, with a dull thud. The conversation is a little on the lines of a Greek chorus. From Gregor's office the head clerk has been sent to see why he has not yet turned up at the station. This grim speed in checking a remiss employee has all the qualities of a bad dream. The speaking through doors, as in the second scene, is now repeated. Note the sequence: the chief clerk talks to Gregor from the living room on the left; Gregor's sister, Grete, talks to her brother from the room on the right; the mother and father join the chief clerk in the living room. Gregor can still speak, but his voice becomes more and more indistinct, and soon his speech cannot be understood. (In *Finnegans Wake,* written twenty years later by James Joyce, two

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washerwomen talking across a river are gradually changed into a stout elm and a stone.) Gregor does not understand why his sister in the right-hand room did not join the others. "She was probably newly out of bed and hadn't even begun to put on her clothes yet. Well, why was she crying? Because he wouldn't get up and let the chief clerk in, because he was in danger of losing his job, and because the boss would begin dunning his parents again for the old debts?" Poor Gregor is so accustomed to be just an instrument to be used by his family that the question of pity does not arise: he does not even hope that Grete might be sorry for him. Mother and sister call to each other from the doors across Gregor's room. The sister and servant are dispatched for a doctor and a locksmith. "But Gregor was now much calmer. The words he uttered were no longer understandable, apparently, although they seemed clear enough to him, even clearer than before, perhaps because his ear had grown accustomed to the sound of them. Yet at any rate people now believed that something was wrong with him, and were ready to help him. The positive certainty with which these first measures had been taken comforted him. He felt himself drawn once more into the human circle and hoped for great and remarkable results from both the doctor and the locksmith, without really distinguishing precisely between them."

Scene V: Gregor opens the door. "Slowly Gregor pushed the chair towards the door, then let go of it, caught hold of the door for support—the soles at the end of his little legs were somewhat sticky—and rested against it for a moment after his efforts. Then he set himself to turning the key in the lock with his mouth. It seemed, unhappily, that he hadn't really any teeth—what could he grip the key with?—but on the other hand his jaws were certainly very strong; with their help he did manage to set the key in motion, heedless of the fact that he was undoubtedly damaging them somewhere, since a brown fluid issued from his mouth, flowed over the key and dripped on the floor. . . . Since he had to pull the door towards him, he was still invisible when it was really wide open. He had to edge himself slowly round the near half of the double door, and to do it very carefully if he was not to fall plump upon his back just on the threshold. He was still carrying out this difficult manoeuvre, with no time to observe anything else, when he heard the chief clerk utter a loud 'Oh!'—it sounded like a gust of wind—and now he could see the man, standing as he was nearest to the door, clapping one hand before his open mouth and slowly backing away as if driven by some invisible steady pressure. His

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mother—in spite of the chief clerk's being there her hair was still undone and sticking up in all directions—first clasped her hands and looked at his father, then took two steps towards Gregor and fell on the floor among her outspread skirts, her face quite hidden on her breast. His father knotted his fist with a fierce expression on his face as if he meant to knock Gregor back into his room, then looked uncertainly round the living room, covered his eyes with his hands and wept till his great chest heaved."

Scene VI: Gregor tries to calm the chief clerk so that he will not be discharged. "'Well,' said Gregor, knowing perfectly that he was the only one who had retained any composure, 'I'll put my clothes on at once, pack up my samples and start off. Will you only let me go? You see, sir, I'm not obstinate, and I'm willing to work; traveling is a hard life, but I couldn't live without it. Where are you going, sir? To the office? Yes? Will you give a true account of all this? One can be temporarily incapacitated, but that's just the moment for remembering former services and bearing in mind that later on, when the incapacity has been got over, one will certainly work with all the more industry and concentration.'" But the chief clerk in horror and as if in a trance is stumbling towards the staircase to escape. Gregor starts to walk towards him—a wonderful bit here—on the hind pair of his three pairs of legs, "but immediately, as he was feeling for a support, he fell down with a little cry upon his many little legs. Hardly was he down when he experienced for the first time this morning a sense of physical comfort; his legs had firm ground under them; they were completely obedient, as he noted with joy; they even strove to carry him forward in whatever direction he chose; and he was inclined to believe that a final relief from all his sufferings was at hand." His mother springs up, and in backing away from him she upsets the coffeepot on the breakfast table so that it pours over the rug. "'Mother, Mother,' said Gregor in a low voice, and looked up at her. The chief clerk, for the moment, had quite slipped from his mind; instead, he could not resist snapping his jaws together at the sight of the streaming coffee. That made his mother scream again." Gregor, looking now for the chief clerk, "made a spring, to be as sure as possible of overtaking him; the chief clerk must have divined his intention, for he leaped down several steps and vanished; he was still yelling 'Ugh!' and it echoed through the whole staircase."

Scene VII: The father brutally drives Gregor back into his room, stamping his feet and flourishing a stick in one hand and a newspaper

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in the other. Gregor has difficulty getting through the partly opened door, but forced by his father he tries until he gets stuck. "One side of his body rose up, he was tilted at an angle in the doorway, his flank was quite bruised, horrid blotches stained the white door, soon he was stuck fast and, left to himself, could not have moved at all, his legs on one side fluttered trembling in the air, those on the other were crushed painfully to the floor—when from behind his father gave him a strong push which was literally a deliverance and he flew far into the room, bleeding freely. The father caught at the handle of the door with the stick and slammed it behind him, and then at last there was silence."

PART TWO

Scene I: The first attempt is made to feed coleopteron Gregor. Under the impression that his condition is some kind of foul but not hopeless illness that may pass with time, he is placed at first on the diet of a sick human being and he finds that a human meal of milk has been offered to him. We are always aware of those doors, doors opening and closing stealthily in the dusk. From the kitchen, across the hallway, to the hallway door of Gregor's room light footsteps had come, his sister's, awakening him from sleep, and he discovers that a basin with milk has been placed within his room. One of his little legs has been damaged in the collision with his father; it will grow better, but in this scene he limps and trails it uselessly behind him. He is a big beetle as beetles go, but he is smaller and more brittle than a human being. Gregor makes for the milk. Alas, while his still human mind eagerly accepts the notion of that sweetish sop, with soft white bread in the milk, his beetle stomach and beetle taste buds refuse a mammal's meal. Although he is very hungry the milk is repulsive to him and he crawls back to the middle of the room.

Scene II: The door theme continues and the duration theme settles in. We shall begin to witness Gregor's usual day and dusk during this fantastic winter of 1912, and his discovery of the security of the couch. But let us look and listen with Gregor through the crack of the parlor door on the left. His father used to read aloud the newspapers to his wife and daughter. True, this has now been interrupted and the flat is silent though not empty of occupants, but on the whole the family is getting used to the situation. Here is the son and brother plunged into a monstrous change that should have sent them scuttling out into the streets for help with shrieks and tears, in wild compassion—but here they are, the three philistines, cosily taking it in their stride.

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I don't know if you read a couple of years ago in the papers about that teenage girl and boy who murdered the girl's mother. It starts with a very Kafkaesque scene: the girl's mother has come home and found her daughter and the boy in the bedroom, and the boy has hit the mother with a hammer—several times—and dragged her away. But the woman is still thrashing and groaning in the kitchen, and the boy says to his sweetheart, "Gimme that hammer. I think I'll have to knock her again." But the girl gives her mate a knife instead and he stabs the girl's mother many, many times, to death—under the impression, probably, that this all is a comic strip: you hit a person, the person sees lots of stars and exclamation marks but revives by and by, in the next installment. Physical life however has no next installment, and soon boy and girl have to do something with dead mother. "Oh, plaster of paris, it will dissolve her completely!" Of course, it will—marvelous idea—place body in bathtub, cover with plaster, and that's all. Meanwhile, with mother under the plaster (which does not work—wrong plaster, perhaps) boy and girl throw several beer parties. What fun! Lovely canned music, and lovely canned beer. "But you can't go, fellas, to the bathroom. The bathroom is a mess."

I'm trying to show you that in so-called real life we find sometimes a great resemblance to the situation in Kafka's fantastic story. Mark the curious mentality of the morons in Kafka who enjoy their evening paper despite the fantastic horror in the middle of their apartment. "'What a quiet life our family has been leading,' said Gregor to himself, and as he sat there motionless staring into the darkness he felt great pride in the fact that he had been able to provide such a life for his parents and sister in such a fine flat." The room is lofty and empty and the beetle begins to dominate the man. The high room "in which he had to lie flat on the floor filled him with an apprehension he could not account for, since it had been his very own room for the past five years—and with a half-unconscious action, not without a slight feeling of shame, he scuttled under the couch, where he felt comfortable at once, although his back was a little cramped and he could not lift his head up, and his only regret was that his body was too broad to get the whole of it under the couch."

Scene III: Gregor's sister brings a selection of foods. She removes the basin of milk, not by means of her bare hands but with a cloth, for it has been touched by the disgusting monster. However, she is a clever little creature, that sister, and brings a whole selection—rotten vegetables, old cheese, bones glazed with dead white sauce—and Gregor whizzed towards this feast. "One after another and with tears of satisfaction in his eyes he quickly devoured the cheese, the vegetables

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and the sauce; the fresh food, on the other hand, had no charms for him, he could not even stand the smell of it and actually dragged away to some little distance the things he could eat." The sister turns the key in the lock slowly as a warning that he should retreat, and she comes and cleans up while Gregor, full of food, tries to hide under the couch.

Scene IV: Grete, the sister, takes on a new importance. It is she who feeds the beetle; she alone enters the beetle's lair, sighing and with an occasional appeal to the saints—it is such a Christian family. In a wonderful passage the cook goes down on her knees to Mrs. Samsa and begs to leave. With tears in her eyes she thanks the Samsas for allowing her to go—as if she were a liberated slave—and without any prompting she swears a solemn oath that she will never say a single word to anyone about what is happening in the Samsa household. "Gregor was fed, once in the early morning while his parents and the servant girl were still asleep, and a second time after they had all had their midday dinner, for then his parents took a short nap and the servant girl could be sent out on some errand or other by his sister. Not that they would have wanted him to starve, of course, but perhaps they could not have borne to know more about his feeding than from hearsay, perhaps too his sister wanted to spare them such little anxieties wherever possible, since they had quite enough to bear as it was."

Scene V: This is a very distressing scene. It transpires that in his human past Gregor has been deceived by his family. Gregor had taken that dreadful job with that nightmare firm because he wished to help his father who five years ago had gone bankrupt. "They had simply got used to it, both the family and Gregor; the money was gratefully accepted and gladly given, but there was no special uprush of warm feeling. With his sister alone had he remained intimate, and it was a secret plan of his that she, who loved music, unlike himself, and could play movingly on the violin, should be sent next year to study at the School of Music, despite the great expense that would entail, which must be made up in some other way. During his brief visits home the School of Music was often mentioned in the talks he had with his sister, but always merely as a beautiful dream which could never come true, and his parents discouraged even these innocent references to it; yet Gregor had made up his mind firmly about it and meant to announce the fact with due solemnity on Christmas Day." Gregor now overhears his father explaining "that a certain amount of investments, a very small amount it was true, had survived the wreck of their fortunes and had even increased a little because the dividends had not been touched meanwhile. And besides that, the money Gregor brought home every

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month—he had kept only a few dollars for himself—had never been quite used up and now amounted to a small capital sum. Behind the door Gregor nodded his head eagerly, rejoiced at this evidence of unexpected thrift and foresight. True, he could really have paid off some more of his father's debts to the boss with this extra money, and so brought much nearer the day on which he could quit his job, but doubtless it was better the way his father had arranged it." The family believes this sum should be kept untouched for a rainy day, but in the meantime how are the living expenses to be met? The father has not worked for five years and could not be expected to do much. And Gregor's mother's asthma would keep her from working. "And was his sister to earn her bread, she who was still a child of seventeen and whose life hitherto had been so pleasant, consisting as it did in dressing herself nicely, sleeping long, helping in the housekeeping, going out to a few modest entertainments and above all playing the violin? At first whenever the need for earning money was mentioned Gregor let go his hold on the door and threw himself down on the cool leather sofa beside it, he felt so hot with shame and grief."

Scene VI: A new relationship begins between brother and sister, this time having to do with a window instead of a door. Gregor "nerved himself to the great effort of pushing an armchair to the window, then crawled up over the window sill and, braced against the chair, leaned against the windowpanes, obviously in some recollection of the sense of freedom that looking out of a window always used to give him." Gregor, or Kafka, seems to think that Gregor's urge to approach the window was a recollection of human experience. Actually, it is a typical insect reaction to light: one finds all sorts of dusty bugs near windowpanes, a moth on its back, a lame daddy longlegs, poor insects cobwebbed in a corner, a buzzing fly still trying to conquer the glass pane. Gregor's human sight is growing dimmer so that he cannot see clearly even across the street. The human detail is dominated by the insect general idea. (But let us not ourselves be insects. Let us first of all study every detail in this story; the general idea will come of itself later when we have all the data we need.) His sister does not understand that Gregor has retained a human heart, human sensitivity, a human sense of decorum, of shame, of humility and pathetic pride. She disturbs him horribly by the noise and haste with which she opens the window to breathe some fresh air, and she does not bother to conceal her disgust at the awful smell in his den. Neither does she conceal her feelings when she actually sees him. One day, about a month after Gregor's metamorphosis, "when there was surely no reason for her to be still startled at

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his appearance, she came a little earlier than usual and found him gazing out of the window, quite motionless, and thus well placed to look like a bogey. . . . She jumped back as if in alarm and banged the door shut; a stranger might well have thought that he had been lying in wait for her there meaning to bite her. Of course he hid himself under the couch at once, but he had to wait until midday before she came again, and she seemed more ill at ease than usual." These things hurt, and nobody understood how they hurt. In an exquisite display of feeling, in order to spare her the repulsive sight of him, Gregor one day "carried a sheet on his back to the couch—it cost him four hours' labor—and arranged it there in such a way as to hide him completely, so that even if she were to bend down she could not see him. . . . Gregor even fancied that he caught a thankful glance from her eye when he lifted the sheet carefully a very little with his head to see how she was taking the new arrangement."

It should be noted how kind, how good our poor little monster is. His beetlehood, while distorting and degrading his body, seems to bring out in him all his human sweetness. His utter unselfishness, his constant preoccupation with the needs of others—this, against the backdrop of his hideous plight comes out in strong relief. Kafka's art consists in accumulating on the one hand, Gregor's insect features, all the sad detail of his insect disguise, and on the other hand, in keeping vivid and limpid before the reader's eyes Gregor's sweet and subtle human nature.

Scene VII: Here occurs the furniture-moving scene. Two months have passed. Up to now only his sister has been visiting him; but, Gregor says to himself, my sister is only a child; she has taken on herself the job of caring for me merely out of childish thoughtlessness. My mother should understand the situation better. So here in the seventh scene the mother, asthmatic, feeble, and muddleheaded, will enter his room for the first time. Kafka prepares the scene carefully. For recreation Gregor had formed the habit of walking on the walls and ceiling. He is at the height of the meagre bliss his beetlehood can produce. "His sister at once remarked the new distraction Gregor had found for himself—he left traces behind him of the sticky stuff on his soles wherever he crawled—and she got the idea in her head of giving him as wide a field as possible to crawl in and of removing the pieces of furniture that hindered him, above all the chest of drawers and the writing desk." Thus the mother is brought in to help move the furniture. She comes to his door with exclamations of joyful eagerness to see her son, an incongruous and automatic reaction that is replaced

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by a certain hush when she enters the mysterious chamber. "Gregor's sister, of course, went in first, to see that everything was in order before letting his mother enter. In great haste Gregor pulled the sheet lower and rucked it more in folds so that it really looked as if it had been thrown accidentally over the couch. And this time he did not peer out from under it; he renounced the pleasure of seeing his mother on this occasion and was only glad that she had come at all. 'Come in, he's out of sight,' said his sister, obviously leading her mother in by the hand."

The women struggle to move the heavy furniture until his mother voices a certain human thought, naive but kind, feeble but not devoid of feeling, when she says: "doesn't it look as if we were showing him, by taking away his furniture, that we have given up hope of his ever getting better and are just leaving him coldly to himself? I think it would be best to keep his room exactly as it has always been, so that when he comes back to us he will find everything unchanged and be able all the more easily to forget what has happened in between." Gregor is torn between two emotions. His beetlehood suggests that an empty room with bare walls would be more convenient for crawling about—all he needed would be some chink to hide in, his indispensable couch—but otherwise he would not need all those human conveniences and adornments. But his mother's voice reminds him of his human background. Unfortunately, his sister has developed a queer self-assurance and has grown accustomed to consider herself an expert in Gregor's affairs as against her parents. "Another factor might have been also the enthusiastic temperament of an adolescent girl, which seeks to indulge itself on every opportunity and which now tempted Grete to exaggerate the horror of her brother's circumstances in order that she might do all the more for him." This is a curious note: the domineering sister, the strong sister of the fairy tales, the handsome busybody lording it over the fool of the family, the proud sisters of Cinderella, the cruel emblem of health, youth, and blossoming beauty in the house of disaster and dust. So they decide to move the things out after all but have a real struggle with the chest of drawers. Gregor is in an awful state of panic. He kept his fretsaw in that chest, with which he used to make things when he was free at home, his sole hobby.

Scene VIII: Gregor tries to save at least the picture in the frame he had made with his cherished fretsaw. Kafka varies his effects in that every time the beetle is seen by his family he is shown in a new position, some new spot. Here Gregor rushes from his hiding place, unseen by the two women now struggling with his writing desk, and climbs the wall to press himself over the picture, his hot, dry belly

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against the soothing cool glass. The mother is not much help in this furniture-moving business and has to be supported by Grete. Grete always remains strong and hale whereas not only her brother but both parents are going to be soon (after the apple-pitching scene) on the brink of sinking into some dull dream, into a state of torpid and decrepit oblivion; but Grete with the hard health of her ruddy adolescence keeps propping them up.

Scene IX: Despite Grete's efforts, the mother catches sight of Gregor, a "huge brown mass on the flowered wallpaper, and before she was really conscious that what she saw was Gregor screamed in a loud, hoarse voice: 'Oh God, oh God!' fell with outspread arms over the couch as if giving up and did not move. 'Gregor!' cried his sister, shaking her fist and glaring at him. This was the first time she had directly addressed him since his metamorphosis." She runs into the living room for something to rouse her mother from the fainting fit. "Gregor wanted to help too—there was still time to rescue the picture—but he was stuck fast to the glass and had to tear himself loose; he then ran after his sister into the next room as if he could advise her, as he used to do; but then had to stand helplessly behind her; she meanwhile searched among various small bottles and when she turned round started in alarm at the sight of him; one bottle fell on the floor and broke; a splinter of glass cut Gregor's face and some kind of corrosive medicine splashed him; without pausing a moment longer Grete gathered up all the bottles she could carry and ran to her mother with them; she banged the door shut with her foot. Gregor was now cut off from his mother, who was perhaps nearly dying because of him; he dared not open the door for fear of frightening away his sister, who had to stay with her mother; there was nothing he could do but wait; and harassed by self-reproach and worry he began now to crawl to and fro, over everything, walls, furniture and ceiling, and finally in his despair, when the whole room seemed to be reeling around him, fell down on to the middle of the big table." There is a change in the respective position of the various members of the family. Mother (on the couch) and sister are in the middle room; Gregor is in the corner in the left room. And presently his father comes home and enters the living room. "And so [Gregor] fled to the door of his own room and crouched against it, to let his father see as soon as he came in from the hall that his son had the good intention of getting back into his own room immediately and that it was not necessary to drive him there, but that if only the door were opened he would disappear at once."

Scene X: The apple-pelting scene comes now. Gregor's father has

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changed and is now at the summit of his power. Instead of the man who used to lie wearily sunk in bed and could scarcely wave an arm in greeting, and when he went out shuffled along laboriously with a crook-handled stick, "Now he was standing there in fine shape; dressed in a smart blue uniform with gold buttons, such as bank messengers wear; his strong double chin bulged over the stiff high collar of his jacket; from under his bushy eyebrows his black eyes darted fresh and penetrating glances; his onetime tangled white hair had been combed flat on either side of a shining and carefully exact parting. He pitched his cap, which bore a gold monogram, probably the badge of some bank, in a wide sweep across the whole room on to a sofa and with the tail-ends of his jacket thrown back, his hands in his trouser pockets, advanced with a grim visage towards Gregor. Likely enough he did not himself know what he meant to do; at any rate he lifted his feet uncommonly high and Gregor was dumbfounded at the enormous size of his shoe soles."

As usual, Gregor is tremendously interested in the movement of human legs, big thick human feet, so different from his own flimmering appendages. We have a repetition of the slow motion theme. (The chief clerk, backing and shuffling, had retreated in slow motion.) Now father and son slowly circle the room: indeed, the whole operation hardly looked like pursuit it was carried out so slowly. And then his father starts to bombard Gregor with the only missiles that the living-dining room could provide—apples, small red apples—and Gregor is driven back into the middle room, back to the heart of his beetlehood. "An apple thrown without much force grazed Gregor's back and glanced off harmlessly. But another following immediately landed right on his back and sank in; Gregor wanted to drag himself forward, as if this startling, incredible pain could be left behind him; but he felt as if nailed to the spot and flattened himself out in a complete derangement of all his senses. With his last conscious look he saw the door of his room being torn open and his mother rushing out ahead of his screaming sister, in her underbodice, for her daughter had loosened her clothing to let her breathe more freely and recover from her swoon; he saw his mother rushing towards his father, leaving one after another behind her on the floor her loosened petticoats, stumbling over her petticoats straight to his father and embracing him, in complete union with him—but here Gregor's sight began to fail—with her hands clasped round his father's neck as she begged for her son's life."

This is the end of part two. Let us sum up the situation. The sister has become frankly antagonistic to her brother. She may have loved

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him once, but now she regards him with disgust and anger. In Mrs. Samsa asthma and emotion struggle. She is a rather mechanical mother, with some mechanical mother-love for her son, but we shall soon see that she, too, is ready to give him up. The father, as already remarked, has reached a certain summit of impressive strength and brutality. From the very first he had been eager to hurt physically his helpless son, and now the apple he has thrown has become embedded in poor Gregor's beetle flesh.

PART THREE

Scene I: "The serious injury done to Gregor, which disabled him for more than a month—the apple went on sticking in his body as a visible reminder, since no one ventured to remove it—seemed to have made even his father recollect that Gregor was a member of the family, despite his present unfortunate and repulsive shape, and ought not to be treated as an enemy, that, on the contrary, family duty required the suppression of disgust and the exercise of patience, nothing but patience." The door theme is taken up again since now, in the evening, the door leading from Gregor's darkened room to the lighted living room is left open. This is a subtle situation. In the previous scene father and mother had reached their highest point of energy, he in his resplendent uniform pitching those little red bombs, emblems of fruitfulness and manliness; and she, the mother, actually moving furniture despite her frail breathing tubes. But after that peak there is a fall, a weakening. It would almost seem that the father himself is on the point of disintegrating and becoming a feeble beetle. Through the opened door a curious current seems to pass. Gregor's beetle illness is catching, his father seems to have caught it, the weakness, the drabness, the dirt. "Soon after supper his father would fall asleep in his armchair; his mother and sister would admonish each other to be silent; his mother, bending low over the lamp, stitched at fine sewing for an underwear firm; his sister, who had taken a job as a salesgirl, was learning shorthand and French in the evenings on the chance of bettering herself. Sometimes his father woke up, and as if quite unaware that he had been sleeping said to the mother: 'What a lot of sewing you're doing today!' and at once fell asleep again, while the two women exchanged a tired smile.

"With a kind of mulishness his father persisted in keeping his uniform on even in the house; his dressing gown hung uselessly on its peg and he slept fully dressed where he sat, as if he were ready for

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service at any moment and even here only at the beck and call of his superior. As a result, his uniform, which was not brand new to start with, began to look dirty, despite all the loving care of the mother and sister to keep it clean, and Gregor often spent whole evenings gazing at the many greasy spots on the garment, gleaming with gold buttons always in a high state of polish, in which the old man sat sleeping in extreme discomfort and yet quite peacefully." The father always refused to go to bed when the time had arrived, despite every inducement offered by the mother and sister, until finally the two women would hoist him up by his armpits from the chair, "And leaning on the two of them he would heave himself up, with difficulty, as if he were a great burden to himself, suffer them to lead him as far as the door and then wave them off and go on alone, while the mother abandoned her needlework and the sister her pen in order to run after him and help him farther." The father's uniform comes close to resembling that of a big but somewhat tarnished scarab. His tired overworked family must get him from one room to another and to bed.

Scene II: The disintegration of the Samsa family continues. They dismiss the servant girl and engage a still cheaper charwoman, a gigantic bony creature who comes in to do the rough work. You must remember that in Prague, 1912, it was much more difficult to clean and cook than in Ithaca, 1954. They have to sell various family ornaments. "But what they lamented most was the fact that they could not leave the flat which was much too big for their present circumstances, because they could not think of any way to shift Gregor. Yet Gregor saw well enough that consideration of him was not the main difficulty preventing the removal, for they could have easily shifted him in some suitable box with a few air holes in it; what really kept them from moving into another flat was rather their own complete hopelessness and the belief that they had been singled out for a misfortune such as had never happened to any of their relations or acquaintances." The family is completely egotistic and has no more strength left after fulfilling its daily obligations.

Scene III: A last flash of human recollections comes to Gregor's mind, prompted by the still living urge in him to help his family. He even remembers vague sweethearts, "but instead of helping him and his family they were one and all unapproachable and he was glad when they vanished." This scene is mainly devoted to Grete, who is now clearly the villain of the piece. "His sister no longer took thought to bring him what might especially please him, but in the morning and at noon before she went to business hurriedly pushed into his room with

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her foot any food that was available, and in the evening cleared it out again with one sweep of the broom, heedless of whether it had been merely tasted, or—as most frequently happened—left untouched. The cleaning of his room, which she now did always in the evenings, could not have been more hastily done. Streaks of dirt stretched along the walls, here and there lay balls of dust and filth. At first Gregor used to station himself in some particularly filthy corner when his sister arrived, in order to reproach her with it, so to speak. But he could have sat there for weeks without getting her to make any improvement; she could see the dirt as well as he did, but she had simply made up her mind to leave it alone. And yet, with a touchiness that was new to her, which seemed anyhow to have infected the whole family, she jealously guarded her claim to be the sole caretaker of Gregor's room." Once when his mother had given the room a thorough cleaning with several buckets of water—the dampness upset Gregor—a grotesque family row ensues. The sister bursts into a storm of weeping while her parents look on in helpless amazement; "then they too began to go into action; the father reproached the mother on his right for not having left the cleaning of Gregor's room to his sister; shrieked at the sister on his left that never again was she to be allowed to clean Gregor's room; while the mother tried to pull the father into his bedroom, since he was beyond himself with agitation; the sister, shaken with sobs, then beat upon the table with her small fists; and Gregor hissed loudly with rage because not one of them thought of shutting the door to spare him such a spectacle and so much noise."

Scene IV: A curious relationship is established between Gregor and the bony charwoman who is rather amused by him, not frightened at all, and in fact she rather likes him. "Come along, then, you old dung beetle," she says. And it is raining outside, the first sign of spring perhaps.

Scene V: The lodgers arrive, the three bearded boarders, with a passion for order. These are mechanical beings; their beards are masks of respectability but actually they are shoddy scoundrels, these serious-looking gentlemen. In this scene a great change comes over the apartment. The boarders take the parents' bedroom on the far left of the flat, beyond the living room. The parents move across to the sister's room on the right of Gregor's room, and Grete has to sleep in the living room but has now no room of her own since the lodgers take their meals in the living room and spend their evenings there. Moreover, the three bearded boarders have brought into this furnished flat some furniture of their own. They have a fiendish love for superficial

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tidiness, and all the odds and ends which they do not need go into Gregor's room. This is exactly the opposite to what had been happening in the furniture scene of part two, scene seven, where there had been an attempt to move everything out of Gregor's room. Then we had the ebb of the furniture, now the return flow, the jetsam washed back, all kinds of junk pouring in; and curiously enough Gregor, though a very sick beetle—the apple wound is festering, and he is starving—finds some beetle pleasure in crawling among all that dusty rubbish. In this fifth scene of part three where all the changes come, the alteration in the family meals is depicted. The mechanical movement of the bearded automatons is matched by the automatic reaction of the Samsas. The lodgers "set themselves at the top end of the table where formerly Gregor and his father and mother had eaten their meals, unfolded their napkins and took knife and fork in hand. At once his mother appeared in the other doorway with a dish of meat and close behind her his sister with a dish of potatoes piled high. The food steamed with a thick vapor. The lodgers bent over the food set before them as if to scrutinize it before eating, in fact the man in the middle, who seemed to pass for an authority with the other two, cut a piece of meat as it lay on the dish, obviously to discover if it were tender or should be sent back to the kitchen. He showed satisfaction, and Gregor's mother and sister, who had been watching anxiously, breathed freely and began to smile." Gregor's keen envious interest in large feet will be recalled; now toothless Gregor is also interested in teeth. "It seemed remarkable to Gregor that among the various noises coming from the table he could always distinguish the sound of their masticating teeth, as if this were a sign to Gregor that one needed teeth in order to eat, and that with toothless jaws even of the finest make one could do nothing. 'I'm hungry enough,' said Gregor sadly to himself, 'but not for that kind of food. How these lodgers are stuffing themselves, and here am I dying of starvation!"

Scene VI: In this great music scene the lodgers have heard Grete playing the violin in the kitchen, and in automatic reaction to the entertainment value of music they suggest that she play for them. The three roomers and the three Samsas gather in the living room.

Without wishing to antagonize lovers of music, I do wish to point out that taken in a general sense music, as perceived by its consumers, belongs to a more primitive, more animal form in the scale of arts than literature or painting. I am taking music as a whole, not in terms of individual creation, imagination, and composition, all of which of course rival the art of literature and painting, but in terms of the

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impact music has on the average listener. A great composer, a great writer, a great painter are brothers. But I think that the impact music in a generalized and primitive form has on the listener is of a more lowly quality than the impact of an average book or an average picture. What I especially have in mind is the soothing, lulling, dulling influence of music on some people, such as of the radio or records.

In Kafka's tale it is merely a girl pitifully scraping on a fiddle, and this corresponds in the piece to the canned music or plugged-in music of today. What Kafka felt about music in general is what I have just described: its stupefying, numbing, animallike quality. This attitude must be kept in mind in interpreting an important sentence that has been misunderstood by some translators. Literally, it reads "Was Gregor an animal to be so affected by music?" That is, in his human form he had cared little for it, but in this scene, in his beetlehood, he succumbs: "He felt as if the way were opening before him to the unknown nourishment he craved." The scene goes as follows. Gregor's sister begins to play for the lodgers. Gregor is attracted by the playing and actually puts his head into the living room. "He felt hardly any surprise at his growing lack of consideration for the others; there had been a time when he prided himself on being considerate. And yet just on this occasion he had more reason than ever to hide himself, since owing to the amount of dust which lay thick in his room and rose into the air at the slightest movement, he too was covered with dust; fluff and hair and remnants of food trailed with him, caught on his back and along his sides; his indifference to everything was much too great for him to turn on his back and scrape himself clean on the carpet, as once he had done several times a day. And in spite of his condition, no shame deterred him from advancing a little over the spotless floor of the living room."

At first no one was aware of him. The lodgers, disappointed in their expectation of hearing good violin playing, were clustered near the window, whispering among themselves and waiting only for the music to stop. And yet, to Gregor, his sister was playing beautifully. He "crawled a little farther forward and lowered his head to the ground so that it might be possible for his eyes to meet hers. Was he an animal, that music had such an effect upon him? He felt as if the way were opening before him to the unknown nourishment he craved. He was determined to push forward till he reached his sister, to pull at her skirt and so let her know that she was to come into his room with her violin, for no one here appreciated her playing as he would appreciate it. He would never let her out of his room, at least, not so long as he lived; his frightful appearance would become, for the first time, useful to him; he

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would watch all the doors of his room at once and spit at intruders; but his sister should need no constraint, she should stay with him of her own free will; she should sit beside him on the couch, bend down her ear to him and hear him confide that he had had the firm intention of sending her to the School of Music, and that, but for his mishap, last Christmas—surely Christmas was long past?—he would have announced it to everybody without allowing a single objection. After this confession his sister would be so touched that she would burst into tears, and Gregor would then raise himself to her shoulder and kiss her on the neck, which, now that she went to business, she kept free of any ribbon or collar."

Suddenly the middle lodger sees Gregor, but instead of driving Gregor out the father tries to soothe the lodgers and (in a reversal of his actions) "spreading out his arms, tried to urge them back into their own room and at the same time to block their view of Gregor. They now began to be really a little angry, one could not tell whether because of the old man's behavior or because it had just dawned on them that all unwittingly they had such a neighbor as Gregor next door. They demanded explanations of his father, they waved their arms like him, tugged uneasily at their beards, and only with reluctance backed towards their room." The sister rushes into the lodgers' room and quickly makes up their beds, but "The old man seemed once more to be so possessed by his mulish self-assertiveness that he was forgetting all the respect he should show to his lodgers. He kept driving them on and driving them on until in the very door of the bedroom the middle lodger stamped his foot loudly on the floor and so brought him to a halt. 'I beg to announce,' said the lodger, lifting one hand and looking also at Gregor's mother and sister, 'that because of the disgusting conditions prevailing in this household and family'—here he spat on the floor with emphatic brevity—'I give you notice on the spot. Naturally I won't pay you a penny for the days I have lived here; on the contrary I shall consider bringing an action for damages against you, based on claims—believe me—that will be easily susceptible of proof.' He ceased and stared straight in front of him, as if he expected something. In fact his two friends at once rushed into the breach with these words: 'And we too give notice on the spot.' On that he seized the door-handle and shut the door with a slam."

Scene VII: The sister is completely unmasked; her betrayal is absolute and fatal to Gregor. "'I won't utter my brother's name in the presence of this creature, and so all I say is: we must try to get rid of it. . . .

"'We must try to get rid of it,' his sister now said explicitly to her

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father, since her mother was coughing too much to hear a word. 'It will be the death of both of you, I can see that coming. When one has to work as hard as we do, all of us, one can't stand this continual torment at home on top of it. At least I can't stand it any longer.' And she burst into such a passion of sobbing that her tears dropped on her mother's face, where she wiped them off mechanically." Both the father and sister agree that Gregor cannot understand them and hence no agreement with him is possible.

"'He must go,' cried Gregor's sister, 'that's the only solution, Father. You must just try to get rid of the idea that this is Gregor. The fact that we've believed it for so long is the root of all our trouble. But how can it be Gregor? If this were Gregor, he would have realized long ago that human beings can't live with such a creature, and he'd have gone away on his own accord. Then we wouldn't have any brother, but we'd be able to go on living and keep his memory in honor. As it is, this creature persecutes us, drives away our lodgers, obviously wants the whole apartment to himself and would have us all sleep in the gutter.'"

That he has disappeared as a human brother and should now disappear as a beetle deals Gregor the last blow. Painfully, because he is so weak and maimed, he crawls back to his own room. At the doorway he turns and his last glance falls on his mother, who was, in fact, almost asleep. "Hardly was he well inside his room when the door was hastily pushed shut, bolted and locked. The sudden noise in his rear startled him so much that his little legs gave beneath him. It was his sister who had shown such haste. She had been standing ready waiting and had made a light spring forward. Gregor had not even heard her coming, and she cried 'At last!' to her parents as she turned the key in the lock." In his darkened room Gregor discovers that he cannot move and though he is in pain it seems to be passing away. "The rotting apple in his back and the inflamed area around it, all covered with soft dust, already hardly troubled him. He thought of his family with tenderness and love. The decision that he must disappear was one that he held to even more strongly than his sister, if that were possible. In this state of vacant and peaceful meditation he remained until the tower clock struck three in the morning. The first broadening of light in the world outside the window entered his consciousness once more. Then his head sank to the floor of its own accord and from his nostrils came the last faint flicker of his breath."

Scene VIII: Gregor's dead, dry body is discovered the next morning by the charwoman and a great warm sense of relief permeates the insect world of his despicable family. Here is a point to be observed

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with care and love. Gregor is a human being in an insect's disguise; his family are insects disguised as people. With Gregor's death their insect souls are suddenly aware that they are free to enjoy themselves. "'Come in beside us, Grete, for a little while,' said Mrs. Samsa* with a tremulous smile, and Grete, not without looking back at the corpse, followed her parents into their bedroom." The charwoman opens the window wide and the air has a certain warmth: it is the end of March when insects come out of hibernation.

Scene IX: We get a wonderful glimpse of the lodgers as they sullenly ask for their breakfast but instead are shown Gregor's corpse. "So they entered and stood around it, with their hands in the pockets of their shabby coats, in the middle of the room already bright with sunlight." What is the key word here? *Shabby* in the sun. As in a fairy tale, in the happy end of a fairy tale, the evil charm is dissipated with the magician's death. The lodgers are seen to be seedy, they are no longer dangerous, whereas on the other hand the Samsa family ascends again, gains in power and lush vitality. The scene ends with a repetition of the staircase theme, just as the chief clerk had retreated in slow motion, clasping the banisters. At the orders of Mr. Samsa that they must leave the lodgers are quelled. "In the hall they all three took their hats from the rack, their sticks from the umbrella stand, bowed in silence and quitted the apartment." Down they go now, three bearded borders, automatons, clockwork puppets, while the Samsa family leans over the banisters to watch them descend. The staircase as it winds down through the apartment house imitates, as it were, an insect's jointed legs; and the lodgers now disappear, now come to view again, as they descend lower and lower, from landing to landing, from articulation to articulation. At one point they are met by an ascending butcher boy with his basket who is first seen rising towards them, then above them, in proud deportment with his basket full of red steaks and luscious innards—red raw meat, the breeding place of fat shiny flies.

Scene X: The last scene is superb in its ironic simplicity. The spring sunshine is with the Samsa family as they write their three letters—articulation, jointed legs, happy legs, three insects writing three letters—of excuse to their employers. "They decided to spend this day in resting and going for a stroll; they had not only deserved such a respite from work, but absolutely needed it." As the charwoman leaves after her morning's work, she giggles amiably as she informs the

*In a note in his annotated copy VN observes that after Gregor's death it is never "father" and "mother" but only Mr. and Mrs. Samsa. Ed.

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family: "'you don't need to bother about how to get rid of the thing next door. It's been seen to already.' Mrs. Samsa and Grete bent over their letters again, as if preoccupied; Mr. Samsa, who perceived that she was eager to begin describing it all in detail, stopped her with a decisive hand. . . .

"'She'll be given notice tonight,' said Mr. Samsa, but neither from his wife nor his daughter did he get any answer, for the charwoman seemed to have shattered again the composure they had barely achieved. They rose, went to the window and stayed there, clasping each other tight. Mr. Samsa turned in his chair to look at them and quietly observed them for a little. Then he called out: 'Come along, now, do. Let bygones be bygones. And you might have some consideration for me.' The two of them complied at once, hastened to him, caressed him and quickly finished their letters.

"Then they all three left the apartment together, which was more than they had done for months, and went by trolley into the open country outside the town. The trolley, in which they were the only passengers, was filled with warm sunshine. Leaning comfortably back in their seats they canvassed their prospects for the future, and it appeared on closer inspection that these were not at all bad, for the jobs they had got, which so far they had never really discussed with each other, were all three admirable and likely to lead to better things later on. The greatest immediate improvement in their condition would of course arise from moving to another house; they wanted to take a smaller and cheaper but also better situated and more easily run apartment than the one they had, which Gregor had selected. While they were thus conversing, it struck both Mr. and Mrs. Samsa, almost at the same moment, as they became aware of their daughter's increasing vivacity, that in spite of all the sorrow of recent times, which had made her cheeks pale, she had bloomed into a buxom girl. They grew quieter and half unconsciously exchanged glances of complete agreement, having come to the conclusion that it would soon be time to find a good husband for her. And it was like a confirmation of their new dreams and excellent intentions that at the end of their journey their daughter sprang to her feet first and stretched her young body."*

Let me sum up various of the main themes of the story.

1. The number *three* plays a considerable role in the story. The story is divided into three parts. There are three doors to Gregor's

*"The soul has died with Gregor; the healthy young animal takes over. The parasites have fattened themselves on Gregor." VN note in his annotated copy. Ed.

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room. His family consists of three people. Three servants appear in the course of the story. Three lodgers have three beards. Three Samsas write three letters. I am very careful not to overwork the significance of symbols, for once you detach a symbol from the artistic core of the book, you lose all sense of enjoyment. The reason is that there are artistic symbols and there are trite, artificial, or even imbecile symbols. You will find a number of such inept symbols in the psychoanalytic and mythological approach to Kafka's work, in the fashionable mixture of sex and myth that is so appealing to mediocre minds. In other words, symbols may be original, and symbols may be stupid and trite. And the abstract symbolic value of an artistic achievement should never prevail over its beautiful burning life.

So, the only emblematic or heraldic rather than symbolic meaning is the stress which is laid upon *three* in "The Metamorphosis." It has really a technical meaning. The trinity, the triplet, the triad, the triptych are obvious art forms such as, say, three pictures of youth, ripe years, and old age, or any other threefold triplex subject. Triptych means a picture or carving in three compartments side by side, and this is exactly the effect that Kafka achieves, for instance, with his three rooms in the beginning of the story—living room, Gregor's bedroom, and sister's room, with Gregor in the central one. Moreover, a threefold pattern suggests the three acts of a play. And finally it must be observed that Kafka's fantasy is emphatically logical; what can be more characteristic of logic than the triad of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. We shall, thus, limit the Kafka symbol of *three* to its aesthetic and logical significance and completely disregard whatever myths the sexual mythologists read into it under the direction of the Viennese witch doctor.

2. Another thematic line is the theme of the doors, of the opening and closing of doors that runs through the whole story.

3. A third thematic line concerns the ups and downs in the well-being of the Samsa family, the subtle state of balance between their flourishing condition and Gregor's desperate and pathetic condition.

There are a few other subthemes but the above are the only ones essential for an understanding of the story.

You will mark Kafka's style. Its clarity, its precise and formal intonation in such striking contrast to the nightmare matter of his tale. No poetical metaphors ornament his stark black-and-white story. The limpidity of his style stresses the dark richness of his fantasy. Contrast and unity, style and matter, manner and plot are most perfectly integrated.

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THE STATE OF CRITICISM

New Criticism to Structuralism

BARBARA ROSECRANCE: I'd like to welcome you all to the *Partisan Review* conference on the state of criticism. I'm Barbara Rosecrance, a member of the editorial board. William Phillips, the editor of *Partisan Review*, will speak first. He will be followed by one commentator, Lawrence Graver, professor of English at Williams College, who has written on Conrad, Beckett, and other modern writers.

William Phillips

It is no secret that many novelists and poets, as well as practicing critics, feel that a good deal of criticism has become an academic exercise. In fact, since the forties criticism has divided into two streams: into practical, socially oriented criticism, represented by such figures as Trilling, Leavis, Howe, Wilson, Pritchett, Kazin, and into literary theory, which has been pursued by Marxists, by the New Critics, by maverick systematizers like Frye and Bloom, by comparativists like de Man, Hartman, and Said, and more recently by the structuralists.

The gap between these two tendencies has steadily widened, to the point where we now have almost two distinct professions, with the "experts," who mostly dominate literary studies in the universities, (less so in France where theory presumably has a public), and who usually promote a favorite doctrine, on the one side; and on the

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The conference on the state of criticism was held on September 14 and 15, 1979, at Boston University. The conference was made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Three additional sessions will be published in a subsequent issue of *Partisan Review*.

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other, the wide-ranging critics, the professional amateurs. The theoretical critics have usually gone in for philosophical, historic, esthetic, and linguistic analysis; the less doctrinaire ones usually have been more concerned with contemporary experience, with values and judgments, and have been more eclectic, more casual, more free-wheeling, and have leaned toward the literary essay. The experts have filled the more academic magazines; the men of letters have written for the quarterlies, but have also invaded the larger circulation magazines and newspapers.

Clearly, this split indicates something is wrong. Practical criticism has become more impressionistic and journalistic, and theoretical criticism more technical. The academy and the marketplace have moved further apart. In 1970, Paul de Man spoke of the crisis of criticism, both here and abroad, though de Man indicated some sympathy with structuralism. Since then there have been many signs, if not of crisis, at least of floundering and confusion. On one side, the authority of criticism has been challenged by various liberation movements, and by the widespread feeling that traditional standards no longer applied to the ferment of new ideas and forms. Of course, what some people take to be a crisis, others see as a release from bondage to the past and a renascence of creative energy and originality—in a new world, without boundaries, without limits. But, however we define what is happening in popular criticism today, the fact is that critical theory has taken a new turn, moving even further away from the common practice of criticism. Indeed, the new criticism has captured the spotlight in France, and has been racing through American universities. But that is an old story: teachers and graduate students, particularly in this country, have never been reticent in picking up the latest critical fashion.

As for the old style pragmatic critics, they represent a variety of gifts and opinions, each with his own intellectual bias and sensibility, and his own blind spots. If we can generalize at all about them, it might be said that the best practicing critics have brought a strong historical sense, an awareness of the social context, and a distinct taste and style, to their examinations of writers, movements, and trends, and to immediate literary issues. On the whole, they have not been formalists or textualists. The best of them, however, have not been ignorant of recent literary theories, nor have they been guilty of the crudities of earlier undisciplined critics.

The development of modern literary theory is a more complicated story, but its chief movements have been the New Criticism, Marxism,

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which might be considered to be the most doctrinaire form of social criticism, and structuralism. And I propose to focus on these approaches as carriers of the continuities, the discontinuities, and the main problems of contemporary criticism. The history of contemporary theoretical criticism might be summed up as a series of inflations and deflations: the inflation and then the deflation of the text, the deflation of the author and the inflation of the interpreter. The New Critics resurrected the text; the structuralists lessened its meaning while enlarging its importance; and both (as well as the Marxists), in different ways, expanded the role of the reader. Finally the text and the process of interpretation came to be seen as open ended. In recent French criticism, a cardinal principle is that there are no privileged or transcendent positions, neither about a text nor about literature in general. The reader continually reconstructs the text. Umberto Eco, for example, a neo-structuralist, spoke of "producing texts by reading them." The process is somewhat parricidal, for the rebirth of the text requires the death of the author. As for judgment, it disappears in theory, but is assumed in practice.

Now this development is not without its share of paradox and irony. For the modern movement in criticism was launched mainly to insure the autonomy and sanctity of the text, and to assure its proper interpretation. This led to a variety of related theories about the structure and meanings of the text, and to a close textual reading. The New Criticism was, of course, largely a reaction against earlier impressionist and biographical approaches, and one-dimensional social and historical interpretations of literature, particularly of the Marxist variety. It was an attempt to free literature from being a branch of civics or morality or politics. The New Critics did not insist that a poem—and most of their criticism was centered on poetry—had only one fixed meaning. But, like most contemporary critics who have not been seduced by structuralism, they did maintain that not all interpretations were equally valid or useful. They certainly did not believe that texts were to be deconstructed and reconstructed. Nor did they think that the reader coauthored the text.

However, the break was not a total one. One element in the continuity in modern critical theory, from the New Critics to the structuralists, is the emphasis on text, almost to the total exclusion of history, the reservoir of human experience, from the writing, reading and judging of literature. True, the New Critics, in response to the charge that they slighted the social and human elements that were transformed into poems and made up the context in which they must

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be read and understood—in response to this accusation that they left history out of their view of literature, the New Critics argued that they took history for granted, in order to concentrate on the formal components of poetry which had previously been neglected and misunderstood. Still, their preoccupation with the text might be seen now as a step in the direction of the exclusive concern of the structuralists with texts and with linguistics as the key to the text. R.P. Blackmur, for example, once said that the future of poetry criticism lay in linguistics. To be sure, by this he meant analysis of the language of poetry, in the traditional sense of the term, not the new theories of linguistics. Nor, unlike the structuralists who believe that the essence of literature is language, did Blackmur have in mind any such narrowing of the scope of criticism. In this respect, structuralist theory, as many of its practitioners claim, marks a break with traditional thinking about literature. Still, the seeds were planted earlier, as I have suggested, and a line of continuity as well as discontinuity could be discerned.

Another break has involved the question of judgment, but this, too, goes back to earlier developments. Judgment has become one of the casualties of the growth of academic criticism, of what might be called its institutionalization, that is, its conversion into a formal discipline, with its own rules and traditions, with a life of its own, so to speak, apart from the unpredictable and unruly course of literature. True enough, the New Critics were not the first to make criticism an academic subject. Before them, criticism came into the academy by the back door, through the emphasis on scholarship. The scholars, who dealt mostly in the dating and authenticating of texts and in the tracing of influences, mainly superficial ones, and usually in subject matter, only occasionally in style, handed out judgments, but these were really received judgments laid down by leading scholars and accepted by the profession as a whole. Like the impressionists, for whom the scholars had no use, they were actually amateur critics, which meant they had no basis for their opinions except in some higher institutional authority.

But even the New Critics, despite their greater sophistication as writers and critics, and their individual competence to make meaningful judgments, propagated methods of analysis that took for granted the quality and importance of the poems they were analyzing or interpreting. Empson, for example, said that judgments were made before or after analysis. What this meant was that in this respect the New Critics were part of the same academic enterprise they were

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challenging, for their method did not provide the means for judging how good or bad a poem was, unless their description of the nature of poetry could be taken as a source of judgment. Such an approach was not only arbitrary and tautological, but also question begging, as some of the New Critics actually believed that the best poems were those containing a maximum of paradox, irony, and ambiguity. (Brooks and Empson were quite explicit in making this connection.)

Several questions can be raised about a method that does not contain within itself the mechanism for making literary judgments. Leavis once said that if judgment is not built into criticism and teaching, one is teaching other people's judgments and experience, not one's own. Leavis meant that the language and tone of criticism must be geared to the quality of the text it is examining, and must reflect the values of the critic. Otherwise he is engaged in an analytical exercise that can be applied equally well to inferior works, and the skillful critic can weave his pattern of interpretation and analysis into any of them. Moreover, a purely analytical or dissecting criticism, like an autopsy, must assume that no one text, any more than any one body, is better than another. In the end, such surgical analysis leads to egalitarianism, that is to say, to the notion that all works, especially new ones, are equally interesting—which, incidentally, is a notion that prevails in many quarters today where critical standards are not in fashion.

But there is also a methodological difficulty in a form of criticism that is not an extension of one's critical judgment. For formal theories and textual explications are actually reductive—reducing the experience of a literary work to its formal components and structure, and to its formal meanings.

This type of reduction has some affinity, though it is at the opposite pole, with that of most Marxist criticism, which, as we know, reduces textual integrity and distinctiveness, and the idiosyncratic character of a work, to its social origins and meanings. It is not that all Marxists, at least the better ones, have ignored the quality of a work. But they have subordinated its quality to its place in the historic scheme—or equated the two. Georg Lukács, for example, who was one of the most intelligent and least formula ridden of the orthodox Marxists, saw the modern novel as an expression of a dying class. Thus he spoke of Thomas Mann as the last great representative of the bourgeoisie, the great recorder of its triumphs and decays, who was limited by his inability to move ahead into a socialist view of man and society. Even Walter Benjamin, the outstanding figure among the unorthodox Marxist critics, was at his best when he was

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not operating within standard Marxist categories, as in his writings on Kafka and his famous piece on art in an age of reproduction.

The most ambitious effort to reform Marxist criticism from within that I have seen is Herbert Marcuse's last work, *The Esthetic Dimension, Toward a Critique of Marxist Esthetics.* (Jameson has recently been attempting to fuse Marxism and structuralism, not too successfully, I believe.) Marcuse's recognition of the private and marginal worlds of art is refreshing and long overdue, as he argues that art reflects neither the so-called reality of existence nor any specific class interests. But his basic assumptions, though not orthodox, do not escape the questions raised by most Marxist criticism. Marcuse's thesis is essentially that authentic art is revolutionary not in its immediate political effects but in its subversion of accepted notions of reality and thus in its advance of human consciousness. Now this view takes for granted that art, like history, is an element of the movement toward a more just and rational society, and, therefore, expresses a deeper and higher truth. In short, art is conceived to be a transcendent form of truth, morality, justice, progress—an instrument, as it were, of social and intellectual liberation. Despite its radical perspective, this is clearly an outmoded view of literature, though a popular one—and rests on two fallacies. It assumes that there is a given knowledge of political and human truths against which art can be tested and which the highest art reflects. It also assumes that art is therapeutic and cathartic, and thus basically moral—and wholesome—in its nature. This is a view, to be sure, that has come down to us from Aristotle, and has been reinforced by the Christian strain in Western civilization. But it has been reiterated largely as a kind of ethical or theological cant—a moralizing ritual, rarely followed in critical practice, and one which few knowledgeable critics feel obliged to go in for today. Such a view of the noble aims of art expresses not the facts of literary life, but the popular—and pious—resistance to the idea that art may have nothing to do with education, or uplift, or with what is commonly supposed to be the "truth." And such a high-minded position seems particularly inappropriate to the internalized, capricious, wayward, often perverse turns of modern art. To be consistent, one would have to exclude from the literary hall of fame, as a moralist like John Gardner in fact does, many outstanding and representative works. This is not to deny that in the broadest sense of these terms, certain human and ethical values do enter into the mind of literature, but not directly, nor in the form of popularly accepted notions of morality.

But, in relation to the movement of modern critical thought,

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there is one aspect of Marxist criticism, as of much social criticism, its playing down the text, that connects it with its opposite, the concentration on the text, that runs from the New Criticism to the latest linguistic and semiological studies. The connecting link is the emphasis on the reader—or perhaps I should say on the idea of the reader. Marxist criticism would have no meaning if it did not assume that a mass of readers were the beneficiaries of the progressive aims of literature. After all, literature can be politically meaningful only if it is capable of advancing or liberating the consciousness of its readers. And it is probably no accident, as Marxists would say, that most left-wing critics—Marcuse is a notable exception—have favored art forms and art works that have a popular appeal. Perhaps it is fitting that in a civilization catering to every quirk and whim of the coddled self all the roads of literary theory should lead to the reader.

I should add that there are several unattached critics who have one foot in theory, of whom the foremost are Northrop Frye and Harold Bloom.* Frye's system of classifications, connected with his belief in archetypes, and Bloom's parricidal doctrine of influence are directed toward the student reader, the newly organized and regimented consumer of literature created by mass education. It is interesting to note that Frye considered judgment to be part of the history of fashion, not criticism. It is also interesting that Hartman regarded Frye as a structuralist. Earlier, there was the large but marginal figure of Winters, who was somewhere between a moralist and formalist. Then there are those who have thought of themselves as exponents of a subject called comparative literature— in my view all study of literature is comparative—some of whom, like Hartman, de Man, and Said, have incorporated structuralist thinking into their own, more empirical, habits of criticism. My sense of their position—or predicament—is that while they have been swayed by the structuralist theory of the protean text and of interminable analysis, their natural bent is toward a more traditional type of exegesis, that presumes a more or less stable text, and toward a more discursive type of critical writing.

I do not want to encroach on the panel dealing with structuralist criticism. It is a big and growing subject. But I should like to stress the fact that structuralism can be seen as the culmination of recent tendencies in the culture as well as in criticism. As I have suggested,

*This is not a roll-call of modern critics who have ventured into theory. Hence I am not considering such critics as Wimsatt, Wellek, Miller, Spitzer, Abrams, to mention only a few.

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the almost exclusive concern with texts, the crowning of the reader, the rejection of history as a context or a continuum, the slurring of the question of judgment, except as something to be assumed—all these aspects of structuralism seem to be extensions, as well as reversals, of the basic principles of the earlier textualists. But the idea that there is no one enterprise, or position, or interpretation more valid than any other, including that of literature itself, that the reader devises ever new interpretations, that, as Barthes said, "the object of structuralism is not man endowed with meanings, but man fabricating meanings . . ."—all this emphasis on change and process, on a world being constantly recreated, represents a radical shift, as the structuralists themselves claim, and as critics like M.H. Abrams and Gerald Graff recently have argued. Like the Marxists, by whom they have been influenced, the structuralists are intent on demystifying—and deconstructing—the existing order of ideas and institutions. (It should be pointed out that the Marxist influence has been large, particularly on the French structuralists, both in terminology and in the attitude toward "bourgeois society," although structuralism, itself, is not a politically radical doctrine.)

Behind the structuralist rhetoric, one can discern some of the antihistorical and antitraditional moods that dominate the current scene. What I have in mind is the pseudo-democratic ethos, in which all ideas are regarded as arbitrary, and equally valid. The premises of the structuralists may not have their source in, but do seem to parallel the current widespread feeling that there are no accepted ideas nor any limits defining acceptable thinking or behavior. In such a situation, process, which Barthes indicated was the essence of structuralism, becomes supreme. Writing itself, *écrire*, is for Barthes an intransitive verb, that is to say, it has no object—or subject; it is the system of signs, the signifier, that makes up the text. Very much in the spirit of the *Zeitgeist*, too, is the structuralist claim to liberation, that ideal of all those who already are or feel themselves liberated. And if the structuralists may be said to have any links to the ethos of contemporary literature, it would be to the fiction of the French objectivists, which reproduces the process and objects of existence, and to current experimental fiction, which dispenses with orderly narrative and the unfolding of destiny.

Lest I be accused of being reductive in my picture of structuralism, let me make some observations about its method and its value in illuminating textual and critical problems. To begin with, the notion of an ordinary or an ideal reader strikes me as a myth, and not a very useful one, for there are only trained and untrained readers. The latter

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cannot deconstruct or construct a text. In fact, the inventive do-it-yourself reader turns out to be the critic himself, that is, Barthes, or Derrida, or Lacan. And though some of these critics exhibit enormous virtuosity and originality, their actual exegeses as well as their constructions are open to question. Take the reconstruction of Balzac's *Sarrasine,* in *S/Z,* by Barthes, probably the most brilliant and most plausible writer associated with French structuralism, perhaps because he is the most traditional. Barthes's exercise of pseudo-fictional free association around an original text is no doubt a dazzling performance, but it demonstrates little more than that Balzac's fictional talent was immeasurably greater than that of Barthes. Or, to consider two other examples: Lacan's examinations of *Hamlet* and of Poe's *Purloined Letter.* In both there is a deployment of terms and categories from linguistics and psychoanalysis, heavily spiced with structuralist jargon. But neither Hamlet nor Poe's story is further illuminated nor given a new dimension. On the contrary, both works are reduced to sexual symbolisms, reminiscent of bad psychoanalytic criticism. Ernest Jones at least tried to explain Hamlet's irresolution. Lacan simply plays with phallic associations. His one original observation, for what it is worth, consists in calling Ophelia "the bait." As for the *Purloined Letter,* Lacan constructs a sexual triumvirate, with the letter, itself, along with other objects, given phallic and castrating meanings, thus missing the essential quality of the story as a model for a long line of detective fictions, in which the logical mind of the detective outthinks his opponents and rivals. Nor does Lacan have anything to say about Poe's distinctive style which is at the same time arch, abstract, precise, and deceptively popular. But structuralist theories avoid the charge of reductionism, by not recognizing there are limits to the liberties that can be taken with a text. Even Lévi-Strauss balked at stretching it too far when he said: "A work of art is an object endowed with precise properties, that must be analytically isolated, and this work can be entirely defined on the grounds of such properties." And in the well-known piece on Baudelaire's *Les Chats,* by Lévi-Strauss and Jakobson, the analysis, which resembles classic close reading, is based on the assumption that structuralist criticism does not require the invention of a new text. I might also mention Derrida's study of Rousseau, which is a chaotic and arbitrary reconstruction of Rousseau's thinking, Soller's essay on Joyce, which is a hodge-podge of free-wheeling rhetoric, and Barbara Johnson's examination of Derrida's and Lacan's method, which is a juggling of terms and categories, that I can barely follow. Also it is worth noting that critics like Barthes and Todorov use

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James Bond to illustrate their theories—an approach I can describe only as the fallacy of the misplaced subject. For it exemplifies the failure to see the difference between entertainment and imaginative writing, which, in the case of Barthes, is especially surprising, in view of his own distinction between the "writerly" and the "readerly" text, the former being complex, the latter more popular.

The main charge that has been made against literary structuralism is that it is unhistorical. This is true. But it oversimplifies the question of the uses to which history can be put, both in theory and in practice. For the structuralists are able to answer quite cleverly that far from being unhistorical they regard all events, all texts, as historical objects, emerging in a given time and place, subject to change, and certainly not representing any eternal order. From this relativist view of history, they are able to treat texts as though they have no permanent nature or value. But they seem to forget that the idea of historicity is characterized more by continuity and causality than by the principle of discontinuity that Foucault and others attribute to history—which by the way, appears to be an accommodation to the Marxists' belief in revolution. The structuralists and the linguists claim that they take the historical context of a work to be part of its meaning, but they rarely connect it explicitly with the configurations of the culture.

Aside from methodological considerations, structuralist and poststructuralist criticism, on the whole, strikes me as lacking in those qualities that suggest a feeling for the medium of literature. It is rarely discursive, mostly dealing in theories of criticism rather than in literary discussion; it is dry, abstract, and (except maybe for some of Barthes, and Foucault, who now say they are not structuralists), almost entirely devoid of wit, irony, sensibility, eloquence, or the language of literary perception. It is the language of technical discourse, often jargon, combined with occasional flurries of humanist rhetoric, very French in flavor, and exhibiting traces of Marxist influence. As Allen Tate said long ago: "The more systematic and methodical, the 'purer' criticism becomes, the less one is liable to feel in it the presence of its immediate occasion. It tends more and more to sound like philosophical discourse." Discourse, I should add, that in the case of much of the new French criticism and its American disciples, is very hard, sometimes impossible, to understand. Who is Lacan's or Derrida's normal reader?

One notable exception to the turgid writing of the structuralist critics and those influenced by structuralism that I have read is Peter

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Brooks's essay on narrative. Brooks is not a structuralist, but he has taken too much, I think, from the structuralists, and his essay strikes me as an elaborate metaphor built on the parallels between the structures of narrative and Freud's conception of the life-cycle. But the thesis is well argued, and the writing, except when too heavily structuralist, is that of a writer, not someone dispensing concepts, categories, and newly invented technical terms as though obscuring were part of the process of clarifying.

Much structuralist writing—like that of a good deal of textual analysis—has the quality of an intellectual game, pursued so ardently and skillfully that the object is often lost sight of. And some structuralist writings, particularly those of Lacan and Derrida, appear to me to be very agile exercises in free association, which is the latest intellectual game. The actual text—or subject—is left far behind as one sentence often does not follow the preceding one and the whole thing becomes incomprehensible. But while free association might be the clue to the unconscious, it is not to be recommended for the use of the conscious mind in philosophical or critical writing. After all, one is only a reader of Derrida or Lacan, not their analyst.

I referred earlier to the effect on criticism of the institutionalization of literature and literary studies. Harry Levin once suggested in a famous piece, that literature has become an institution. And in a recent essay, Frank Kermode discussed, not entirely disapprovingly, the process by which critical opinion becomes solidified and transmitted to young students and teachers in the universities. This process is the institutionalization of criticism. Kermode's point, which seems to me well taken, was that a consensus of critical thinking emerged from this activity. But there is a negative side, too. Literary studies, conducted mainly in the universities, have reinforced the notion that literary works were created in order to be analyzed in the classroom. And, indeed, their origin and *raison d'être* was to be found in the necessity of teaching literature not only to graduate students, but to vast numbers of undergraduates, many of whom are neither serious students nor readers of literature. In order not to teach simply an appreciation of good books, which in the past put teachers in an evangelical role and reinforced popular misconceptions about literature, and in order to solidify the profession, it was necessary to devise a complex system of critical theory, complete with methods of reading and interpretation, codification of genres, styles, subjects, and the other paraphernalia of teaching and understanding that all of us here have had to learn. The target and presumed beneficiary of this professionalized study of

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literature has been the student reader, who has not much interest and less need for a type of criticism that has been abstracted from literature and has little relation to his own experience. As we all know, as soon as he or she graduates, this student reader returns to his amateur status, a graduated non-reader.

In the 1950s, I did a stint at the University of Minnesota that revealed to me the usefulness of the New Criticism as a didactic tool. I soon discovered that it was difficult to teach modern writing to students who had no experience, no values, no judgment to bring to the reading of figures like Kafka, Mann, Beckett. They were bright but unsophisticated, and it dawned on me that the New Criticism provided a marvelous means of teaching books to students who could not comprehend texts but could be gotten to interpret them. Later, I realized that this device is even more useful as a method of training future teachers—that is, as vocational training.

Perhaps I should make explicit what has been implicit in the picture I have drawn of modern criticism, namely, my belief that its main task is normative, though it does take on descriptive and analytic functions. In my opinion, criticism must promote values and make judgments. Usually the best criticism does so by allying itself with contemporary modes of thinking and writing and taking positions on issues involving the direction of literature and its relation to other forces in the culture. In such a role, criticism cannot be separated from judgment, and judgment becomes natural and organic to criticism. Just as every new work of literature is a criticism of earlier works, so every work of criticism should have some bearing on the direction of fiction and poetry. In short, what I am suggesting is that the main function of criticism is not philosophical or exegetical. As Baudelaire put it: ". . . to justify its existence, criticism should be partial, passionate, political, that is to say, written from an exclusive point of view, but a point of view that opens up the widest horizons." (It will be recalled that Eliot characterized intense exegesis as "the lemon squeezer school of criticism.") My view is, of course, based on a different conception of the nature of literature from that assumed by many textual critics, who appear to assume it is made up of texts to be studied or reconstructed. If I may paraphrase a famous formulation, it seems to me that critics should be more concerned with changing literature than with interpreting it—that is, with literary values rather than with hermeneutics.

In questioning interpretation, or textual criticism, I am obviously going against the grain of contemporary criticism—and against

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what some of you believe and practice. And I recognize a certain paradox in my favoring a more traditional type of criticism, which Hayden White called "normal" or "ordinary" criticism, over the presumably more advanced and more systematic modes, which White referred to as "absurdist" criticism. But I think that the more advanced theories represent an advance in specialization and in textual investigation and manipulation, which has taken them further and further from the experience of literature, and its relation to the rest of the culture. As Blackmur once said, "No amount of linguistic analysis can explain the *feeling* or existence of a poem." One could resolve many of these questions about the function of criticism as Denis Donoghue suggests, by acknowledging that there are many types of criticism, each with its own territorial rights, each having something to offer readers and students. The trouble with this kind of catholicity is that it is based on the belief that all positions are equally "privileged" or "unprivileged"—which is precisely what is being questioned. Resolutions of this type elevate eclecticism and tolerance into critical principles.

We have come a long way from the New Criticism. Since then everything seems to have become not only more specialized but more chaotic. It is probably asking too much of literary criticism to expect it to be less chaotic than the rest of our thinking. But it should at least recognize the limitations of textual constructions and deconstructions. Unfortunately the generalizing power of criticism appears to be in inverse proportion to its capacity for specialization.

I said that structuralists have put too much emphasis on discontinuity. There is one area, however, in literature—not in criticism—where continuity has been exaggerated. And it is here that structuralists, in suggesting that texts are not made up of tightly woven, logically connected meanings, have corrected the overzealous modes of interpretation of earlier criticism. The truth is that not everything in a novel or poem fits into a coherent pattern, as we usually assume, being the heirs of a tradition in which all experience is organized into an organic whole. Hence the ingenuity of critics has been employed to make a perfect fit out of acts and statements that are random, gratuitous, and disconnected, and come out of those corners of the writer's mind that are not coordinated with its center. The enterprise of interpretation rests on the notion that everything has to be explained and creates the illusion that everything can be explained.

Perhaps the history of modern criticism could be summed up briefly as the decline of the man of letters and the rise of the literary

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specialist. As John Gross put it in *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters,* "Instead of men of letters, there are academic experts, mass media pundits, cultural functionaries."

Lawrence Graver

Since William Phillips sees a major split and some minor rifts as dominant features of the critical scene, I suppose I am at least being consistent if I offer a split response to his paper. With one important part of what he says, I am in strong agreement: the high regard for the criticism of Leavis, Wilson, Trilling, Pritchett, Howe, and Kazin—criticism that William Phillips justly praises (despite individual differences) as uncommonly sensitive to historical and to contemporary issues; subtly argued from tough-minded, complex moral and political perspectives; distinct in voice; and alive to the challenges of analyzing and judging new writing as it has appeared week by week for nearly half a century.

The first book of criticism I read as a student at City College was *On Native Grounds;* and one of my most vivid undergraduate memories is of a fascinating, seemingly endless quarrel about whether Lionel Trilling was right to insist that the greatness of *Huckleberry Finn* rests in its power of telling the truth about the virtues and depravities of the human heart. (Just recalling this now makes those seem like the days before the flood.) And I am not exaggerating when I say that hardly a week has gone by in the thirty years since without my having read with pleasure and benefit, a book, an essay, or a review by one of the critics who serve as touchstones for William Phillips in his paper. So on some vital matters of value (and about one kind of criticism we would like to see more of) we are in accord; and I hope we have a chance to talk later on about the nature of the accomplishments of these critics.

If the objections I have to William Phillips's paper were as easy to formulate as the area of sympathetic agreement, the rest of my commentary would be as amiable and relaxed as the opening. But they are not, for they involve tangled matters of fact, interpretation, and emphasis. Let me isolate a few difficulties.

My first problem has to do with William Phillips's account of the history of criticism in the past forty years; and the second with his

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passionately held belief that most current literary theorists are often bad influences who draw us away from what he calls "the medium of literature" and humane values. I realize, of course, that his paper is a set of reflections—obviously not a survey, not meant to be systematic—but nonetheless I think it distorts a number of historical facts and is questionable in many matters of interpretation.

My major objections are to the connected series of images of two streams and several schools, and of a widening gap between them; of professional amateurs prevailing in the quarterlies and mass magazines, and of theory-oriented experts little concerned with history, value, and judgment dominating literary studies in the universities (with New Criticism now giving way to, or merging with a rising structuralist tide). And if I had more time I would also want to question William Phillips's description of what New Criticism was and what structuralist criticism (if anything now exists in this country that can usefully be called by that name) is actually like.

When I think about the critical scene in recent years, I do not see two streams and a widening gap, but something more opaque and shifting (often bewilderingly so)—a much messier scene uncommonly resistant to mapping.

First of all I see a crisscrossing at every point and level: an extraordinary proliferation of critical journals (many of them, such as *The New York Review of Books, New Literary History, Critical Inquiry, Diacritics, Glyph,* and so on, less than twenty years old); and many of the same fine critics writing for nearly all of them, and working in and out (mostly in) the universities. Frank Kermode is likely to appear in *The Review of English Studies, New Statesman, Critical Inquiry,* the mass Sunday papers in England and America, and scores of other publications across the spectrum of readership. Northrop Frye has published dozens of books and essays for different audiences, appears on TV, edits textbooks for grade schools *and* the universities. And I'm sure you could easily extend the list with many examples of your own.

Second: I do not see in this country any ruling critical school but rather a great variety of methods and approaches; very few cardinals and certainly no pope; but instead many fiercely independent, polemical critics, several of whom often describe themselves as revisionists or schismatics, going "beyond" something (exactly what is being revised, broken up, or being gone beyond will be coming up again and again). This variety is reflected not only in the weeklies, quarterlies, and learned journals, but in a typical American university

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English curriculum which might look in outline something like this: a majority of courses blending close reading of a New Critical kind with historical analysis emphasizing literary, political, philosophical, and social questions; American studies courses again with divergent critical methods; courses in Afro-American literature; other courses looking at literature from a Marxist, psychoanalytical, feminist, phenomenological, or anthropological perspective; some courses in film and popular culture; and courses reflecting the methods of scholars and critics who may now disavow the label "structuralist" but who work in areas at least conventionally perceived to be linked to structuralism: linguistics, reader-response criticism, semiotics, and so on.

My third related point is that despite the fact that there is a great deal of pedestrian, self-serving, trivializing, and useless criticism, there has also been an exceptionally large number of impressive and influential books and essays that are not easily classifiable by generalizations about practical versus theoretical criticism, or by "literary school"—works by critics who are subtle, assimilative, and multidisciplinary. Here is a scattering of examples—not meant to be my (or anybody else's) "top ten," but works and critics chosen to illustrate the fact that attention to the immediacy of poems, novels, and plays often goes together with profound knowledge of literary and cultural history, theory, and methodology, and certainly judgment and value. (From an overly developed sense of decorum, I am excluding the work of participants in the conference lest *PR* be interpreted too singularly in its colloquial sense. But I'm sure you will intuit their relevance.)

Christopher Ricks's books on Milton, Tennyson, and Keats (and his hundreds of essays and reviews written for many audiences); Donald Davie's struggles with Pound and his writings on eighteenth-century and contemporary poetry; C.L. Barber on Shakespeare; Wayne Booth on the rhetoric of fiction and irony; Helen Vendler on Stevens, Yeats, Herbert, and recent poetry; Barbara Hardy on nineteenth-century fiction; Richard Poirier and Leo Marx with intricate, very different perspectives on American books and culture; Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel*; Hugh Kenner on Joyce, Eliot, Beckett, and modernism; M.H. Abrams's *Mirror and the Lamp* and *Natural Supernaturalism*; Robert Pinsky's *The Situation of Poetry*; recent criticism on literature written by women and blacks (such as Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own*, the essays of Ellison, Baldwin, and many younger, lesser-known critics). And I could enlarge this list several times over with little difficulty.

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You will have noticed that my selection is deliberately Anglo-American and that I have purposefully separated many of the critics William Phillips describes as theorists who might to a greater or lesser degree be related to developments in Germany and France, most notably structuralism. I have not read all the books and essays by Hartman, Bloom, and Fish, and I would not pretend to be able to summarize the swirl of controversy now surrounding their writings; but I have read enough to convince me that their work (wildly different as it is in crucial ways from the more traditional Anglo-American criticism I am used to admiring) might also be fairly described as attentive to language and effect in poetry, saturated in literary and other kinds of history, methodologically self-conscious and diverse; and important (among other reasons) for broadening not narrowing the subject matter of criticism, and for asking us at least to consider new questions and possibilities. And it cannot be fairly said that their works are "academic exercises" or free from judgment or value; indeed much of their writing has the most notorious and often subversive kinds of social, political, and epistemological implications (and that is one reason why it gets people so angry).

Although these writers (and the older Northrop Frye) cannot be usefully labeled "structuralists," they have been correctly seen by William Phillips and others as related to a structuralist mood or tendency. In other words, they are often interested in some of the same issues and methods that have preoccupied European structuralists (whether they are "neo" or "post" or whatever) during the past twenty-five years; and they have to some degree been influenced by continental writings, often in the way of challenge and dispute. It is this mood or tendency—however we agree to define the phenomenon, assess its influence, or speculate about its future—that has been attracting great interest and causing controversy in recent years; and if one sees it as a negative or deplorable tendency, he will need a more precise and extended set of formulations of the problems (and a fuller, less scattershot discussion of structuralism) than William Phillips has given us. But we will hear more about these matters this afternoon.

Now lest you think this breathless catalogue is meant to illustrate a golden age of criticism, or that I am moving toward a conclusion celebrating the glories of democratic pluralism, my last points should dispel these notions and help focus some of my own uncertainties and concerns. Even if you were to accept my description of the diversity of recent criticism (and you will want to argue with general points, specific examples, and perhaps the entire sketch), you *may* be willing

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to agree with me (as I do with William Phillips) that when many intelligent people speak about the *state* of contemporary criticism, they are likely to echo the narrator of Beckett's *How It Is*, who, crawling naked eternally through the mud, keeps punctuating his unpunctuated recitation with the droning phrase: "something wrong there."

It would take more talent, knowledge, and time than I now have to provide a reliable account of the many current, fiercely conflicting views on the topic "Literary Criticism and its Discontents"; but I cannot share William Phillips's belief that the major problems in criticism today stem from a split between theory and practice, or from a rising and dangerous structuralist tide. Nor can I share (although I would like to) his implicit assumption that if most critics wrote like Leavis, Wilson, Howe, Trilling, etc., things would somehow turn out all right. There are just too many vexing and interrelated problems. Some observers would point to the very proliferation and diversity I have just described as a cause or symptom of our troubles: fragmentation, glut, scattering of effects, confusion of tongues, and so on. Others would focus on the historical situation—a time when virtually everything in critical discourse is being contested: the status of the text, the author, the subject, the reader, interpretation, evaluation, literary history, the very nature of literature itself. And of course this is not just the result of work done by literary theorists but the seemingly inevitable development of modern history shaped not only by Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, but by imperialism, wars, revolutions, the emergence of continents, and just about everything else. If we are still part of Randall Jarrell's famous "Age of Criticism," we are also ironically in many ways back to basics, arguing first principles in a thoroughly skeptical time—another fact that often makes discourse difficult, but also a reason why some people find the current situation exhilarating, the prospects for criticism promising, and many of the more radical critics not the villains but the heroes of the story. Then, of course, there is the problem of audience. Certainly the audience for literary criticism has diminished in the past thirty years. Why has this happened and what are some of its implications? And finally any extended account of our present situation would have to include one part of what Lionel Trilling used to call the "stubborn actual"—the relationship between criticism and the distressed state of English studies and of the larger society in which critics live and work.

Criticism has always been an embattled activity and I don't want to exaggerate the extremity of the current situation. The first chapter

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of I.A. Richards's *Principles of Literary Criticism* published in 1924 is called "The Chaos of Critical Theories"; and we can all find our favorite quote from Arnold, Dr. Johnson, and perhaps even the pre-Socratics deploring the disorder of the critical scene and the flight from some ideal center of value. But I sometimes wonder if there has ever been a time when so many critics were doing so many different things with so little agreement about principles and so varied and yet edgy a sense of the audience to whom they were addressing their commentaries.

We will hear a great deal about much of this in the next two days, and I would not want to have to predict where the discussion will go. Yesterday, when I told two of my colleagues at Williams how I was planning to spend today and tomorrow, one (just out of graduate school) said: "Better bring your helmet"; the other, older naturally, said: "Better bring your pillow." There continues to be sharp critical polemic (and valuable polemic: Gerald Graff's *Literature Against Itself* is a much debated recent example). But speaking as someone who is not a historian of criticism, I think that along with the polemic we also need more careful and extended exposition. Arguments about heroes and villains will (and should) go on. A friend of mine wants to make a movie, a western that might tell us a bit about "How It Is" in contemporary criticism, starring Hillis Miller, Frank Kermode, and M.H. Abrams, and called "Shootout at Hermeneutic Gap."

But I really do think we need more patient exposition of what is actually going on now in criticism—spoken and written if possible in plain language; and we will have to continue performing that strenuous undertaking: expounding a particular critic's position while he is growing, regressing, or changing his mind. That of course is one of the virtues of Jonathan Culler's *Structuralist Poetics*, however much one may want to quarrel with its descriptions, or its program for what criticism should most usefully attend to. And that is also one of the virtues of the new journal, *Critical Inquiry*, which gives so much space to dialogue, replies, and rejoinders.

This request for patience, more exposition, a lower temperature in at least some of the rooms of the house of criticism is of course easy to attack. Very knowledgeable critics in the middle of work they think vital will hardly want to stop to explain things to people like me who they say should have been attending more carefully years ago. Readers and critics skeptical of or hostile to much now going on may reject the more unconventional criticism as esoteric, faddish, wrongheaded,

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irrelevant, and perhaps pernicious—continental drift; and they will characterize my request for exposition as naive, too liberal, or permissive. Some will say that the differences in assumptions, aims, and procedures of many of the contesting critics are so profound that the idea of a continued, fruitful discussion is a chimera. Still *more* criticism of criticism has the paradoxical effect of validating the enterprise at the same time that it isolates it. And someone is sure to dismiss my last points with a phrase I saw in print for the first time recently: "mere common sense."

There are a lot of problems here, not the least of which is whether we can agree on how and at what point it would be most useful to begin talking about them.

BARBARA ROSECRANCE: We have limited time, but we'd like to go on for another half hour to allow William Phillips to respond and the commentator to counter-respond.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: Well, I made some notes as Lawrence Graver was talking, and, as you might expect, on the points he agreed with me, I agreed with him, and on the points he disagreed with me, I disagreed with him. He made an appeal to common sense—but I thought that was what I was doing! Common sense is vague enough to be appealed to by people on different sides of the fence. Certain types of analysis seem to me contrary to what might be called either common sense or normal reading. Certain types of exegesis and critical literary study have changed the normal mode of reading. Look into your own experience and you realize that when you were a student studying a text or when you were teaching a text, that is not the way you read a book or a text, so there has been a kind of revolution in reading. Now it could be argued that this revolution in reading is for the better. But I do not think it is.

Lawrence Graver also said that the situation is more complex than I presented it. It always is. Obviously there are exceptions and currents I did not include. What I tried to do, though, is draw the main lines of critical thinking in the modern period. That meant leaving a lot of things out, leaving a lot of people out. The question is whether these main lines are illuminating or not. Obviously, I think they are. Some of the exceptions that Lawrence Graver mentions seem to me to demonstrate my view rather than his. And just to mention the proliferation of criticism and of

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journals in this period seems to me not to prove anything, except that it might be a sign of confusion and the availability of funds. *Critical Inquiry*, for example, prints highly specialized theoretical criticism, of the kind that is at issue in this discussion. I didn't go into Fish and Bloom, because they exemplify what I have been criticizing. Fish is a highly theoretical critic. He started out as a textual critic, but he's been shifting more and more to the position that we've roughly characterized as structuralist.

I also tried to make clear that there is no all-inclusive definition of structuralism. Roland Barthes says that structuralism is not an ideology; it's not a philosophy; it's a method; it's a way of looking at things, used differently by different people. Geoffrey Hartman regards Frye as an early structuralist, a precursor of structuralism. Certainly he's an example of the attempt to scienticize literature, that is, to develop scientific categories. Frye indicated that he was not interested in literary judgment. He said that literary judgment belongs to the history of taste, not to the history of criticism, and that he was trying to develop a theoretical approach based on classifications and categories of literature. There are many tendencies in modern criticism, but we're dealing with the central ones.

Some years ago I read a psychoanalytic study of *Death of a Salesman*, in which all the complex machinery of psychoanalytic and literary criticism was trained on the study of this play. It never seems to have occurred to the writer of this piece, or perhaps to many of the readers, that *Death of a Salesman* was an inferior work and that the writer was using the kind of language, the tone, the appeals to our sense of language and our sense of taste, to our experience in reading literature, in talking about *Death of a Salesman*, that one might use for the greatest literary works. Similarly, in some of the new criticism, the popular James Bond stories are analyzed with the high-powered methodology of sturcturalism. The method used to talk about them is precisely the same method that could be used to talk about Proust or Shakespeare or Rilke. Now what I'm suggesting is that one's tone and language have to be consonant with one's judgments. Otherwise, one is using a neutral method of analysis that can apply to any work. Clement Greenberg, for example, was judging the abstract expressionists at the same time that he was developing a code of critical terms and categories, and there was a consonance of the two.

LAWRENCE GRAVER: In William Phillips's response to me he mentioned my evoking common sense. I thought the theme of my commentary

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was that we really are very early in the game in talking about many of the things that are happening now and that we're having a great deal of trouble in critical discourse in deciding what the issues are and what we should be talking about. For example, I'll cite three instances in recent criticism. You all know the famous book, Susan Sontag's *Against Interpretation.* Well, she writes against interpretation. Geoffrey Hartman in *The Fate of Reading* said if he had his way he wouldn't have used—that's a book of about three years ago, four years ago—that title. He would have used the title *For Interpretation.* Jonathan Cullers's essay of about three or four years ago is called "Beyond Interpretation." Now are they all talking about the same thing? Does the word "interpretation" mean the same thing to those three critics? I think not. And in a number of places in William Phillips's paper I felt that he was making statements about what was going on in contemporary criticism which would be strongly contested, not only by the partisans but perhaps by people who were following it and who would not necessarily be structuralist partisans.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: Can you and I agree on the meaning of the word "interpretation"?

LAWRENCE GRAVER: Well, I understand the word "interpretation" to mean to clarify the meaning of something. That's my basic definition.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: That's the popular meaning, but it also designates a certain kind of textual analysis or exegesis.

LAWRENCE GRAVER: A number of these questions I honestly can't address because I don't know enough about structuralist positions, and this afternoon we're going to hear a lot more about this. But I do think, if you agree, that one of the characteristics of the critical scene is that everything seems to be contested, and not—I would argue—by lunatics, or by faddish fools, although you would disagree with me on that, but by critics of considerable intelligence and accomplishment, however we eventually rate Bloom and Barthes. But the issue of the contesting of the principles is one of the characteristics of the critical scene that I find most dominant. I feel that on some of these issues it's too early to say definitely one way or the other that this critical system is bankrupt or this critical system will lead to sterility or barrenness. For example, I think that if we were sitting here in 1932 and discussing New Criticism at that point, it would have been very hard to say anything predictive about it.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: Some of us did. We said certain things about it and some of them even happened to be true!

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LAWRENCE GRAVER: But I think it would have been very hard to predict—and I was only a year old then—the effect of New Criticism on reading in general in 1932, because, as you correctly say, it started out as a theoretical movement. It then became a tool for doing a particular job that needed to be done. The new critical techniques happened to fit very nicely, and they had extraordinarily important contributions to make to the teaching of reading. Of course, many of the current attacks on the new critics and their methods are well founded, but I think there's been a lot of misrepresentation about the role of history in new criticism, about the whole issue of science, and I think those are some of the issues I would like to hear debated. My sense of your paper is that you were making conclusive statements about the nature and direction of some tendencies in contemporary criticism which seemed to me either misconstructions or premature conclusions.

STEVEN MARCUS: I would like to make two comments, one of them on a statement that Lawrence Graver made and William Phillips picked up, which has to do with the proliferation of academic journals of literary criticism being somehow a sign of the vitality of, the life of, criticism in the United States. I'm afraid that is really not a convincing argument, since it seems to me from what I know that the proliferation of academic journals is as much a function of the economics of university presses as it is of any critical activity. And one finds in recent years an equivalent proliferation in every other discipline, many of which are moribund if not torpid. What academic presses discovered was that once you set up a publication system for journals, it costs very little money to keep producing new journals in sufficient numbers to break even. So it's no great burden economically upon academic presses to turn out one more journal, and I don't think that in the first instance these new journals have anything to do with the vitality of literary criticism. One would have to demonstrate it from some other sector, it seems to me.

LAWRENCE GRAVER: A quick parenthesis. I was talking about the proliferation of critical journals as a sign of diversity, but I thought at the end I talked about it as clearly an ambivalent matter which one can say is very much the source of our troubles. I related it to the theme of the difficulty of discourse, that one of the reasons we find it so difficult to talk to one another is that we're reading different journals. Most people who have been involved in discussions of contemporary criticism have been struck by the problem of the difficulty of discourse. We do not talk well about our situation and our problem in discussions of this kind.

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STEVEN MARCUS: All right, I take the qualification. Now I want to respond briefly to what William Phillips said about his psychoanalytic critic who brought the entire psychoanalytic machinery of terms and devices of interpretation to bear upon *Death of a Salesman*, which obviously cannot stand up beneath it. It seems to me that that doesn't make the point, or doesn't answer the point in some sense, because I don't think that psychoanalysis contains within itself—any more than any particular literary critic or any other method does—the means for making judgments of quality, either. I have never heard, or I don't think anybody has ever heard, a psychoanalyst say that's a good or a bad dream. Heaven knows they may think that at certain points. I would say that it's characteristic of both Freud and what happens in psychoanalysis that he can move without any sense of shifting gears intellectually from a discussion of Hamlet or Oedipus to a discussion of Gradiva, that is to say an absolutely third-rate popular novel, and treat it as if it were as complex, as interesting, and as important in many ways as the other, because he's doing something else. He's not interested in the goodness or badness of a work of literature as a work of literature. He's interested in kinds of complexities and a process of thinking which show up in texts sometimes good, sometimes bad, sometimes indifferent, but they're there for his purpose really.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: What about a literary critic who uses the same method of analysis for *Hamlet* as he does for *Death of a Salesman*?

STEVEN MARCUS: I don't follow you.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: There have been literary critics, I can't think of an example at the moment, who have trained the same machinery on inferior works.

STEVEN MARCUS: Yes, that's true. What about it?

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: It's not a psychoanalyst's business to have judgment. That's why I want to shift the discussion to literary critics.

STEVEN MARCUS: It is a literary critic's business. All I've been saying is there's nothing inherent in any literary method that I know which leads to judgments of quality.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: I agree with that.

MORRIS DICKSTEIN: There's an interesting remark, an amusing and revealing remark in Roland Barthes's essay on the Eiffel Tower, in which he at one point compares the view that you get from the top of the Eiffel Tower to the view of a structuralist critic. That is to say, the city is laid out before that view as a kind of grid, and what he doesn't say is that there's really no interference from immediate experience. Jameson says that structuralism is essentially the con-

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struction of a model. From the top of the Eiffel Tower everything becomes pure model, pure grid, or pure structure. I think the limitation of that, I mean the strength of that, is that it does involve itself in a kind of defamiliarization. Much as I dislike the jargon-riddled, pseudo-technical, pseudo-chemical mode of literary criticism as much as everyone who's spoken here, it does involve a kind of defamiliarization. It assumes that we have taken property of the text too easily, that we're too familiar with it, and by turning it into a discourse very different from, and even very alien to, that of art, that if insofar as you can apprehend what the critic is saying at all, the process of defamiliarization occurs in which an apprehension, a new kind of apprehension of the work, perhaps not an apprehension through wonder but a new kind of apprehension of the work, can occur. I think the limitation of that is not an apprehension through wonder or through experience, but it's an apprehension that's, in a sense, perched so high, at such a distance from the work, in a discourse so alien to the work, that we will often have a feeling that it makes no connection to the work, that it becomes a kind of distance for its own sake, a perspective that really has nothing to do with the city below it.

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French Structuralist Theories

RUDI CARDONA: The session this afternoon is devoted to French structuralist theories. The main speaker is Denis Donoghue, formerly connected with the University College at Dublin, at present with New York University. You no doubt know his books on Yeats and for the Masters Series, *The Sovereign Ghosts: Studies in Imagination*, among others. The commentators will be Peter Brooks from Yale University, author of *The Melodramatic Imagination* and *Novel of Worldliness*, and Edith Kurzweil from Rutgers University, author of *The Age of Structuralism*.

Denis Donoghue

It has often been assumed that a serious literary criticism is bound to be political in its themes, even if it is formal and aesthetic in its procedures. In our own time, reality has usually taken a political form, and criticism has kept itself serious by maintaining political interests. Twenty or thirty years ago, it was assumed that a serious literary criticism would work on the understanding that reality is predominantly political, social, and, under those auspices, personal. That assumption has been weakened. It is now widely, though not universally, asserted that a serious literary criticism is responsive to issues which are ultimately philosophical. The critics who are proffered to our attention are philosophers, philosophical historians, and linguists; they are literary critics only betimes.

This situation is a trouble to those of us who, like myself, lack the training of a philosopher. It may be true, as John Crowe Ransom said many years ago, that philosophy is the proper homework for a critic; that he should resort to the philosophers in his spare time, so that in his working time he will be more accomplished in his terms and definitions. It may be true; though I suspect that Ransom was merely intimating that he found it congenial to read Hegel and Kant. It may be the case, however, that the only philosophers who bear upon our literary interests are virtually impossible to read, if you are

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not trained to assimilate such strong meat. If we are to take Jacques Derrida into our minds, we must start by receiving Plato, Rousseau, Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger, since most of Derrida's work is an aggressive critique of those men. I don't think we can take those debates for granted, or skip over them in our zest for Derrida's observations on Freud, Mallarmé, Genet, Levinas, and Bataille.

I shall mention another consideration before coming to my duty. Much of what I propose to say will arise from my notion of structuralism and my still more fervent attention to certain critiques of structuralism which have been offered in recent years, often by critics who are lapsed or revisionist structuralists. But I want to say, what is obvious but still worth saying, that many of the most formidable critics writing today have not concerned themselves, officially, either with structuralism or the arguments against it. It would be invidious to name names, but you can all think of critics who are going about their important work without bothering to concern themselves with such matters. There are many universities in which the study of literature proceeds with little or no anxiety about current questions in structuralism or its revisionist manifestations. I would hope that such institutions have examined the questions raised by structuralists and have come to the conclusion that the questions are trivial, or in any event expendable. I trust that they have not reached this conclusion by a combination of intuition and revulsion. The easy answer to these remarks is that a plural society accommodates many different concerns. I welcome the answer and use it against those who try to turn criticism into terrorism by insisting that criticism must deal with one question, or one set of questions, and with that alone.

I shall make a few comments about the assumptions of structuralism, without worrying much about the degree to which its ideal theory is embodied in any particular critic. Everyone agrees that structuralism proceeded by applying a linguistic model to anthropology, in the first instance, and thereafter to the human sciences, literature, and other things. The basic principle arises from Saussure's distinction between *langue* and *parole*; between language as a system of signs and the particular acts of speech which are performed within the system. Saussure thought of speech as chiefly an oral rather than a written event, and he emphasized the arbitrariness of the signifier as sounds. In language, he said, there are only differences; and he meant, to begin with, differences of sounds. The differences are retained within the system: no difference escapes from the system, so language

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may be considered self-enclosed and self-sufficient. One signifier is explicated by another. I think it fair to say that structuralism is far more concerned with *langue* than with *parole*, since language secretes the several codes which define the practical possibilities of speech and, indeed, sets limits upon them. The relation between language and speech is deemed to be largely the dominance of the first over the second. The first (language), is the only term which could be made the object of a single science. It follows that structuralists are much more interested in relations than in attributes; they are not concerned with attributes or terms as independent entities, but with the relations between them, and especially with dual or binary relations. It is customary to say that for a structuralist a door is either open or closed. And since the object of scientific attention is the system of signs, structuralists are more concerned with the system as the present state of its relations rather than with the process by which the system has come to be thus and not other. Historical or genetic questions are deemed to be secondary issues. In a linguistic system, the crucial question is the relatedness of values at the present moment. Language is not considered as nomenclature but as a structure of values in mutual tension. Structuralists are not interested in the indicative or univocal relation between the word "table" and the object on which they lean to write their essays; they are interested in the word as signifier, related by difference to all the other signifiers on the same linguistic level.

The question we have to propose at this point is simple enough: can we find any single motive which prompts structuralism toward the several principles which join to define it? Suppose we argue, for instance, that structuralism is an attempt to subdue the force of time, or temporal pressure, in the understanding of the matter in hand: what would follow? We can readily admit that people have been willing to think that they understand something by understanding how it has come to be. If one thing happens after another, we assume that it has happened because of the other. In reading a novel, we assume that the events in the fifth chapter depend upon the events in the preceding four. Barthes has considered this question in one of the fundamental essays of structuralism, his "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative" (1966). He conceded that opinions differed on the question. Vladimir Propp insisted that the chronological order is irreducible: the story is bound to the orthodoxy and consequence of beginning, middle, and end. But other structuralists, including Lévi-Strauss, Greimas, Bremond, and Todorov continue to posit an

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atemporal logic of narrative, lying unperturbed behind the chronological flurry. In narrative, according to Lévi-Strauss, the chronological order of succession is reabsorbed by an atemporal matrix. So a structuralist analysis of a novel would dissociate itself from the flurry of chronology and consequence and try to find a purely structural logic which would account for the temporal illusion. As Barthes put it, "temporality is no more than a structural class of narrative . . . : from the point of view of narrative, what we call time does not exist, or at least it only exists functionally, as an element of a semiotic system: time does not belong to discourse proper, but to the referent."

I am reasonably sure that structuralism is indeed hostile to the understanding of the question in hand in terms of time, sequence, consequence, and so forth; but it would be premature to settle for that conclusion, while other conclusions are possible. Note, not at all incidentally, that in the quotation from Barthes on narrative, the structuralist is quick to say that something does not exist, or at least that it exists only functionally, exists only as a function. Would it explain anything in structuralism if we were to seize upon this paradigm or cadence and find in it a characterizing tendency: to say that something doesn't exist, or that it exists only as a function? Is it not the case that several words which a traditionally minded critic would use and value are treated by structuralists in a certain way: the structuralist does not deny these words, but he denies their inaugurative power. They are not allowed to take an initiative; indeed, they are merely illusory consequences of a system which has somehow cloned itself into force.

Don't we find the same desire at work when Kristeva, Barthes, and Sollers refer to the subject or the speaking subject or the author; when Lacan refers to the self; when Barthes refers to characters in a novel; when Derrida refers to virtually everything that has been harbored within the terminology of Western metaphysics? I am aware that there are differences. Kristeva denies that the speaking subject exists in discourse, but she is willing to give him a chance to be produced, brought into at least the illusion of existence, by the play of signifiers within discourse. The process of production is correlated to the process of the play of language. When Barthes, Todorov, Greimas, and other critics feel bound to acknowledge the use of the word "character," or at least to confront the question of character in fiction, they refuse to acknowledge such a thing on the basis of psychological essence. They resent the privilege which fiction has often accorded, or

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appeared to accord, to a character. So they displace every seemingly identifying quality by removing it from subject to predicate; that is, from the subject as an illusory person or individual to a set of predicates which may easily enough be called roles, functions, or (in Greimas's term) actants. In *S/Z*, Barthes says that a character is created "when identical semes traverse the same proper name several times and appear to settle upon it." (The seme is the unit of the signifier.) In this emphasis a character's name acts as a magnetic field for the semes. Clearly, what the word "character" refers to is not a symbolic identity, or even a configuration of illusory attributes, but a name marking the site on which certain similar semes intersect. This is compatible with Barthes's insistence, in *S/Z* and other books, that one's subjectivity is merely "the wake of all the codes which constitute me, so that my subjectivity has ultimately the generality of stereotypes." Each person is merely the wake left by the motion of a ship: the ship is the structure of relevant codes, relevant to the society and time in which he lives. Lacan opposes any philosophy that issues from the *cogito*, and argues that it is language as symbolic system which gives the human person his function as subject. The person is endlessly displaced and reconstituted by the passage of his desire through the symbolic order of language. Language is the categorical form of otherness: contact with it makes the subject possible.

The pattern I am describing is a pattern of desire, the structuralist desire to find that an entity does not exist, that it is a mere mystification. So the critic tries to demystify entities and replace them by functions. Entities are enjoyed only in their disappearance; discourse only when it has disavowed every trace of ontology. A classic moment in this enterprise is provided by Barthes's essay on the death of the author, which identifies writing with the destruction of every voice, every point of origin. "Writing," according to Barthes, "is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing." Mallarmé is a structuralist hero because he advocated a process by which language replaces the person traditionally supposed to be its lord and master; the person, traditionally recognized in the rhetorical power of his voice. In structuralist terms, the writer does not exist before the writing, he is born with his text, he is not the subject for whom the book is predicate. Furthermore, what he writes is already written, only the order of the words is changed, the writer can only "imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original." If a writer is naive enough to think that his feeling is original, and that

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the words he finds translate his feeling, more or less inadequately, into sequence and form; he errs. His feeling is already inscribed, like the words in a dictionary. In this view, virtually nothing is spontaneous, everything is already an imitation. Even desire, according to René Girard, is mediated by an external or internal model. Here again we find the same paradigm: from entity to function, since entity is only another name for presence or being, and the status of imitation cannot be other than functional. If the ostensibly creative author does not exist, nothing remains but the reader, and he remains only as the interim sum of all the codes by which he has been traversed. It is curious to find Barthes and other critics conceding to the reader a worthier fate than that of the author; but the reader must be of a certain disposition. He must not try to interpret or decipher the text he is reading, because that would involve nothing but the attempt to meet the author in his personality, by means of his words. To ascribe to the text an inaugurative author would mean giving it a final signified and closing the text at that moment. Traditional interpretation seeks to find, beneath the words, a source, an origin, a personal or creative presence: when such a presence is found, interpretation is complete. A secret is to be discovered, out of our desire for the replacement of bewilderment by knowledge. Barthes denounces the attempt: the space of writing, he says, is to be ranged over, but not pierced. The ranging is again called play, because it consists of the refusal to fix a meaning or identify a meaning with a presence. The reader is not allowed to interpret, but he is allowed to defeat interpretation. Like the author, he is without history, biography, or psychology: "he is simply that *someone* who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted." He is like an encyclopedia or a concordance, a place where all the anteriority of writing is located. So a structuralist would not say: I am reading such and such a book. The reader is "one," not "I."

At this point it appears that recent structuralists have driven themselves far beyond anything that Saussure would sanction. Saussure was certainly more concerned with the language-system than with the speech-acts performed under its auspices, but he allowed for individual freedom in the production of new signs. Again, Roman Jakobson and other formalists agreed that the degree of freedom in language increases with the size of the unit: in the deployment of phonemes, we are hardly free at all, but our freedom increases as we move from phonemes to words, phrases, sentences, and more sentences. Recent structuralists have resented this argument, lest it

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represent an attempt to recover lost ground or move back from functions to entities. Barthes's *S/Z* is perhaps the most exhaustive attempt to read a text without positing an author who might be disclosed in his freedom, or even in such freedom as is consistent with temporality and finitude. The book is well established, so it is unnecessary to describe it in detail. I would remark, though, that its basic motive is directed against a bourgeois society which insists on having signs that don't look like signs or don't acknowledge their character as signs: such a society, according to Barthes, craves the consolation of thinking that its signs are transparent, that you can look through them to an authentic reality which exists independently of the signs. Barthes wants to force his readers to admit that their signs are signs: indeed, that the signifier must be released from its bondage to the signified. In reading Balzac's *Sarrasine*, we are to seek out the play of the codes, not the plan of the work. We are to produce the work, not merely consume it or interpret it, two activities pretty nearly identical. The text is to be performed, rather than read: the reader is himself a plurality of other texts, so he should engage in the play of codes, taking all the parts in the play.

It may appear that I have strayed from my duty, which was to point and keep pointing to a certain gesture, paradigm, or pattern which I find inhabiting structuralists like a nervous tic; the rush from entities to functions. On the contrary, I find the evidence of *S/Z* decisive in precisely this regard: the world itself is deemed to be a function according to Barthes's rhetoric. At the beginning of the book he distinguishes between works readerly and writerly: readerly books are parsimonious in offering plurality of meanings, writerly books are lavish in that respect. "The writerly text is a perpetual present, upon which no *consequent* language (which would inevitably make it past) can be superimposed; the writerly text is *ourselves writing*, before the infinite play of the world (the world as function) is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system (Ideology, Genus, Criticism) which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of language." Note that the phrase "the world as function" glosses "the infinite play of the world": one comes immediately after the other in a parenthesis. The phrases are synonymous. It is only under the auspices of play that the world becomes function rather than presence: outside or beyond the infinite field of play, the world is congenial or oppressive but it is imperiously present, we are enclosed in it. Doesn't this prompt us to say that in moving from entities to functions, or rather in making entities

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inhabit only the virtual space which they would inhabit as functions, the structuralist critic is trying to disarm the enemy; neutralize his force, take the venom out of his sting? And then what? So that play can prevail?

Yes, in the sense that play is one of the most positive terms in structuralism. In different contexts it has meant demystification, deconstruction; the first is the gesture of voiding, cancelling, erasing, dissolving entities into functions, that kind of thing into that kind of shadow; the second is the withholding of credence, it means retaining a notion but retaining it reluctantly, holding it but holding it suspect, treating every idea as an ideology. Play also means, in other contexts, refusing to be bound by the relentless sequence of beginning, middle, and end, the fatality of order: it means the act by which the metaphysic of being and presence is suppressed. I have said that play is a crucial term in structuralism, but it is also the term which turns structuralists into lapsed structuralists, as if the term, itself played with sufficient agility, disclosed the limitations of the doctrine it enhanced.

I shall come back to this question, but meanwhile I should indicate some of the critical and limiting observations which structuralism has been forced to recognize. I take them in no particular order, but I begin with Derrida, who maintains that structuralism is tainted through and through with the very metaphysics it proposes to subdue. Derrida's main critique is directed against Saussure and Lévi-Strauss. He argues that Lévi-Strauss's structuralism is in practice a phonologism: the animating force in his work is nostalgia for a world of speech, gesture, shared sounds, audible tokens of plenitude and mutuality. Writing, specifically alphabetic writing, is treated as a servile instrument, not even a second best to speech but the enemy of speech: in *The Savage Mind* and other books, writing is directly associated with imperialism, colonization, and enslavement. What the books express is mainly remorse on behalf of those who have destroyed the life of presence. Against Saussure, Derrida maintains that the notion of the sign is itself theological; likewise the notion of structure: because both terms long for a stable order of significance, a center that holds. In the binary oppositions of linguistics, each term is merely an accomplice of the other, and the ostensible opposition is fully compatible with the logocentric and ethnocentric concepts of Western metaphysics. Derrida might have forgiven Saussure his linguistic theory if he had practiced it with misgiving amounting to dread; but Saussure's tone is too equable to be condoned. Indeed,

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Derrida's constant argument, against Foucault and Lacan as vigorously as against Plato, Rousseau, Hegel, and Husserl, is that when they think themselves free of their heritage they are most deplorably immersed in it. Structuralism is only an unacknowledged form of idealism, precisely because of its notion of the sign. This notion, Derrida says in the *Grammatology*, "remains within the heritage of that logocentrism which is also a phonocentrism: absolute proximity of voice and being, of voice and the meaning of being, of voice and the ideality of meaning."

Much the same argument is directed against Saussure's position by Sebastiano Timpanaro, though for an entirely different cause. In his book *On Materialism* (1970), Timpanaro rehearses many of the standard charges against structuralism, notably that it is incapable of dealing with history because it deals with language only as a closed system; it cannot recognize the relations between human activities and their material conditions. But Timpanaro goes on to attack Lévi-Strauss, Lacan, Foucault, and especially Saussure, for the "tendentially Platonist-idealist features" in their thought. His general argument is that structuralists are terrified of admitting into their context the slightest trace of naturalism. In Saussure, this means that his concept of the signified represents "a flight from the *things* denoted," lest they lead him back to a materialist or even a realist philosophy. Timpanaro's critique is far more elaborate and searching than my account of it suggests, but its main force is thrown against the idealist or Platonist element in structuralism. And indeed if he were writing now rather than ten years ago he would go even further in his attack: the tendency to free the signifier from every trace of loyalty to the signified is far more extreme in Barthes and Derrida than it was in Saussure, Foucault, or Lévi-Strauss. I am surprised that the deconstructive irony so readily turned against the concepts of Western metaphysics is withheld from the notion that the absorption of reality in language is complete. It is this element in structuralism which makes it flimsy even when it sounds tough: many of its procedures seem authoritative until, on second perusal, they seem merely ingenious. But this is to anticipate, or to offer a tendentious note where it is not required.

The main thrust of the attack upon structuralism has involved the word "structure" itself: increasingly, it appears to be a nuisance, a constriction. It is surely significant, for instance, that Barthes in his later books gave it up, and turned toward a willfully hedonist idiom of play and pleasure. I cannot hope to say anything worthwhile about

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the diverse accounts of play as given by Derrida, Sollers, and Bataille; but in Barthes the crucial motive is the pleasure attendant upon the exercise of power. The supreme form of power is represented as sexual, writing being the Kamasutra of language, as he calls it in *The Pleasure of the Text.* There and elsewhere, Barthes urges the reader to entertain every logical or other contradiction, unabashed, for the sake of pleasure; and to hold meaning not as an ultimate aim but as an event at every moment revocable, reversible, and incomplete. In the preface to Lucette Finas's *Le bruit d'Iris* (1978), Barthes criticizes structuralism for failing to include or allow for excess in its system. He approves of Finas's determination to "exploit" the text of Mallarmé, and he introduces into the experience of reading the terminology of perversion, fetishism, and sadism. What he finds inadequate in structuralism now is that it lacks the notions of force, intensity, flux, and excess: the boring aspect of structuralism, he suggests, is its infatuation with the strict opposition of yes and no, A and B, there is never recognition of more or less, of degrees of intensity or force. This brings us round again to Derrida's use of both terms, play and force. Play, to represent it briefly and inadequately, is that which the mind must conceive before the alternative of presence and absence. Play is the term of terms within which the concept of being must be situated and, indeed, rebuked: the force of mind is Nietzschean in its affirmation, something like the tragic joy which Yeats attributed to Nietzsche and invoked in "Lapis Lazuli."

It is my understanding that the words "play" and "force" are close kin in Derrida's mind. In the first chapter of *L'écriture et la différence* he addresses himself to Jean Rousset's book *Forme et signification,* and he says that in the future, structuralism may be interpreted "as a relaxation, if not a lapse, of the attention given to *force,* which is the tension of force itself." "*Form* fascinates," Derrida said, "when one no longer has the force to understand force from within force itself."

> Criticism henceforth knows itself separated from force, occasionally avenging itself on force by gravely and profoundly proving that separation is the condition of the work, and not only of the discourse on the work.

It is this knowledge, according to Derrida, which accounts for the note of melancholy and diminished ardor beneath the most subtle essays in the structuralist analysis of texts. The reason is that the relief and design of structures appear more clearly when content, "which is

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the living energy of meaning," is neutralized; like a city no longer inhabited "not simply left behind, but haunted by meaning and culture." Hence the structuralist consciousness is a catastrophic consciousness, at once destroyed and destructive, destructuring. Derrida leaves the notion of force at that point, but we are not required to do the same; because what is force if not that endless play of the world which Derrida's later books constantly exalt?

Most of the critiques I have recited are pointing beyond structuralism, beckoning us with terminologies of play, pleasure, sexuality, process, force, violence, and so forth. But we should take care not to replace one form of intimidation by another, or by several. A terminology tends to be coercive, because it pretends to be universal while it is partial through and through. But I am reluctant to leave the subject before bringing forward two questions which seem to me especially close to our concerns. I find the first in Harold Bloom, a critic whose work bears even more than it overbears. In *Kabbalah and Criticism* Bloom refers briefly to structuralists who constantly write about "language" and "structure," and he maintains that both words are almost wholly figurative. And then he has this beautiful and moving passage:

> To say that the thinking subject is a fiction, and that the manipulation of language by that subject merely extends a fiction, is no more enlightening in itself than it would be to say that "language" is the thinking subject, and the human psyche the object of discourse. Language is hardly in itself a privileged kind of explanation, and linguistic models are useful only for linguistic problems. The obsession with "language" is one of the clearest instances of a defensive trope in modern literary discourse, from Nietzsche to the present moment. It is a latecomer's defense, since it seeks to make of "language" a perpetual earliness, or a freshness, rather than a medium always aged by the shadows of anteriority. Shelley thought that language was the remnant of abandoned fragmented cyclic poems, and Emerson saw language as fossil poetry. Is this less persuasive than currently modish views that literature is merely a special form of language?

I take the second question from Paul Ricoeur. It is well known that Ricoeur has dealt gently with the fundamental tenets of structuralism, but he is dissatisfied with them for several reasons. First: structuralism excludes from its consideration the act of speaking, either as individual performance or as producing new utterances. Second: it excludes history, not merely in the diachronic sense, that is, the passage from one system to another, "but rather the generation . . . of the work of

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speech in each and every case." Third: it excludes the primary intention of language, "which is to say something about something." In moving from the merely virtual system which structuralists call "language" to its actual and actualized form which nearly everyone would be willing to call "speech" or "discourse," Ricoeur finds support in Emile Benveniste's *Problems in General Linguistics.* Benveniste makes a distinction between semiotics and semantics: the sign is the unit of language, and its study is semiotics: the sentence is the unit of discourse, and its study is semantics. In *The Conflict of Interpretations* and more specifically in *The Rule of Metaphor* Ricoeur calls upon Benveniste's distinction so that he can say, for instance, that Saussure's analysis of the signifier and the signified as constituting the sign holds good, if at all, only in semiotics, or in the semiotic order, not in the semantic order. Benveniste points out that in semiotics what the sign signifies does not have to be defined: it is necessary and sufficient for a sign to exist, that it be accepted. But in the semantic order we are moved beyond the yes or no of semiotics into the repetitions of discourse which, when recognized as repetitions, are received as meaning. Ricoeur's argument is that the referential function and power, vested in the sentence, compensates for another characteristic of language, which is the separation of signs from things: it is by means of reference that language, or rather discourse, returns to reality, which it tried to grasp and express. In an essay called "What is a Text?" he considers two possibilities which we confront as readers. The first is that "we can remain in the suspense of the text and treat it as a worldless and authorless text, in which case we explain it by means of its internal relations, its structure." The second is that "we can remove the text's suspense, accomplish it in a way similar to speech, returning it to living communication, in which case we interpret it." This means that reading consists in a dialectical interplay of these two attitudes: we may call them structuralism and hermeneutics. Ricoeur has a larger investment in the second than in the first, but he is happy to recommend that each be retained and exercised within the act of reading.

So what have we suggested, as a program of reading? Literary criticism could reasonably settle for a procedure involving semiotics, hermeneutics, and poetics, in that order. Semiotics would provoke the considerations described by structuralism; hermeneutics would be concerned with problems of interpretation, semantic problems for the most part. And poetics would be concerned with an ever larger, more comprehensive account of human relations and possibilities, exempli-

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fied by poems, as a matter of convenient reference, but to be found in other forms of "symbolic action," to use Kenneth Burke's phrase. Note that the units become larger as we move from sign to sentence to poem; a good omen, this, for the scale of critical activity and the freedom we should encourage in its practice.

Peter Brooks

British and American critics addressing themselves to the definition and evaluation of structuralism often have tended to moralize the issue. They have wanted to find a "structuralist philosophy"—a metaphysics and particularly an ethics—and consequently have tended to extract from structuralist work certain implied tenets of belief, metaphors of ontological and ethical choices, which can be formulated as a view of man and the world and hence mastered by a criticism which is itself traditionally and deeply committed to moral premises. While Denis Donoghue is usually accurate and indeed acute in his descriptions of structuralism, and I often find myself in agreement with him, he too tends to want to discover a structuralist "doctrine" and to motivate structuralist positions and procedures in an ethical context. When, for instance, he says that structuralist critics "resent the privilege which fiction has often accorded . . . to a character," the word "resent" suggests a bundle of desires and fears which in my view has little to do with the *logic* of the critique of the concept of character as it develops in the functionalist view of narrative elaborated from Propp through Barthes. In another instance, to say that structuralism is "hostile to the understanding" of narrative "in terms of time, sequence, consequence" is, again, to make an ethical and psychological metaphor from a certain operatory principle of structural analysis (the analytic priority of the synchronic to the diachronic), then to draw from it general implications, which in this case happen to be inaccurate: if time is a concept with which structuralism will not and cannot deal, sequence and consequence have been much discussed in structuralist work on narrative, including that of Barthes. Denis Donoghue's doctrinal extrapolations might, I'm aware, claim a certain justification in the fact that many critics flying various structuralist banners have themselves been wildly metaphorical in their usage, for instance of the Saussurian model of the sign: to call the relation of

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signifier to signified "arbitrary" proved a useful gesture in linguistic analysis, but it does not necessarily follow that all we read about the "arbitrariness of narrative," for instance, or the lack of relation between signifiers and signifieds in a poem, has any analytic value at all; it is based on a moralized extension of Saussurian concepts beyond their proper field. Too often (as Jonathan Culler has pointed out) the "linguistic model" has in fact been rather the "linguistic metaphor"; and in the shift—as is so often the case with metaphorical usages—an analytic procedure has been moralized, become a hidden metaphysics.

I do not mean to argue that structuralism is (or *was*, since as a "movement" it is past) without an implicit ideology, but I do think it is less than fruitful to look for a structuralist "doctrine," and an error to attempt the extrapolation of a structuralist philosophy. Structuralism more than anything else has been a kind of activity, a form of analysis, a mode of attention, and its contribution to literary criticism has not been a body of doctrine, nor even a lexicon, but rather a new set of gestures, or perhaps more accurately, a very old set of gestures renewed. And here I find wholly pertinent the pattern, or paradigm, which Denis Donoghue repeatedly finds in structuralist work: its characteristic movement from entity to function, its choice to replace a thing, or a presence, with a set of relations, a place within a system. Saussure's decision that language is form and not substance, a systematic set of relations in which what counts (because it is what is analyzable) is not entities in themselves but the differences between them, stands as the inaugural gesture of structuralism. It is of course preeminently a formalist gesture, based on the explicit belief that progress in analytic linguistics could be achieved only by formalization of the field of study, which here (as elsewhere) meant defining the limits of the field of study, closing its frontiers, abstracting it from historical process—taking a horizontal slice through it—and establishing the interrelationship of phenomena in the field thus defined. To proceed in such a manner is no doubt an inevitable fact of any true formalism: I think of Valéry's remark, "What is form for others is subject matter for me." Form becomes the matter to be treated (Valéry maintains that "Le Cimetière marin" was written as a reflection on the metric form of the *décasyllable*), which should not mean hypostatizing form into substance, into an entity. In detecting the move from entity to function to be a "paradigm" of structuralist thought, Denis Donoghue is himself making a move in the best tradition of structuralism, pointing out the formal pattern characteristic of a kind of thinking. This way of describing structuralism is to my mind far more pertinent

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and useful than attempts to find its "doctrine," or to conceptualize its fundamental positions as "the death of the author" or "the abolition of time."

The attempt to find a structuralist doctrine of literary criticism meets with frustration at least in part because one finds very few pure and true examples of the type: some of the work of Barthes and Greimas in the mid-sixties, and, more consistently, the work of Todorov, who more than anyone else could make legitimate claim to being the only "hard" structuralist critic, though I would want to argue that this is because he continues in so many respects the tradition of Russian and Prague formalisms. Much of the criticism that Denis Donoghue cites—especially Derrida and the Barthes of *S/Z* and *Pleasure of the Text*—usually bears the label "poststructuralist," and with some reason: it takes off from structuralism, and derives much of its power from its impatience with the closures and limitations which the "true" structuralist voluntarily accepts, indeed cannot do without. It seems clear by now that the refuge, or the Valhalla, of true structuralists interested in literature and language must be in semiotics, that is, in the general theory of signs, including sign-function and sign-production: work that can provide a disciplined grounding and framework for literary criticism, but which is not itself literary criticism because it does not, or should not, have a direct applicability to the interpretation of texts. I would argue, in the manner of Jonathan Culler, that structuralism in its semiotic branch can provide elements of a poetics of literature, but should not be construed as itself hermeneutic—as, unfortunately, it sometimes has been. The linguistic model, as Culler says, does not constitute a "discovery procedure": it does not in and of itself produce pertinent readings of texts, but rather a ground on which to test and discuss the procedures used in various readings. Linguistics in interpretive criticism generally is less model than metaphor, a means of access to literature's ways of talking about its own medium. There is nothing wrong with reading literature through the optic of its reflection on language; on the contrary, I would see this as at least a necessary step in any criticism, but one must not confuse it with a privileged, or "scientific," view of literature. That way terrorism lies

At the very least, I would argue that structuralism has allowed us to work with a more serious understanding of the linguistic medium of literature, of what is at stake in the functioning of sign-systems, than was normally the case before its advent. It has, if you will, been one stage in our protracted post-Romantic housecleaning, a final liquida-

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tion of myths of interiority. The trouble with Anglo-American formalism—that of the New Criticism—may have been, as Geoffrey Hartman once complained, that it was never formalist enough. It lacked the semiotic models that it needed to go beyond brilliant instances of interpretation, to the poetics it was often striving to formulate, and which might have closely resembled the "functionalist" view of structuralism—which was indeed adumbrated prior to New Criticism by the Russian Formalists. Most valuable in the structuralist hygiene—and again, I take semiotics to be the relevant branch of structuralism when we are talking about literary criticism—may have been a general foregrounding of the concept and the elements of semiosis, the production of meaning in signs. There is a valuable ascesis in the semiotician's insistence upon denaturalizing signs: it is his standard operating procedure to take artifacts that appear natural and to analyze them in terms of the cultural codes of which they are part, or to which they refer. I find here a healthy attitude of suspicion; a refusal to be duped by appearances of motivation and natural analogy, by metaphors of organic form, and by the tendency of culture surreptitiously to "naturalize" its messages. Barthes's *Mythologies* were an early and still persuasive example of the uses of such a semiotic suspicion directed at the everyday messages of the contemporary landscape. It is as part of that paradigmatic move from entity to function that we have learned increasingly in our century (and here structuralism is merely consonant with much that preceded it) to see human art and behavior as coded, indeed to see "the human" as in part defined by code-production.

To call structuralism hygienic is of course to suggest that one needs to recognize the limits of its pertinence, and to acknowledge that there are valid acts of criticism outside these limits. But this does not mean that the questions raised by structuralism can validly be met by "indifference," an attitude which Denis Donoghue seems at one point to endorse, and which has been distressingly prevalent in some branches of the literary-critical establishment. If the work of structuralism should not limit our attention to one set of questions, or one set of procedures, it may nonetheless be allowed to show up some questions and some procedures as semiotically naive or even invalid. To put it in another way, we can at least ask of our students, and of responsible participants in cultural dialogue, that they have read Saussure and Jakobson along with their other master thinkers. It is at least valuable to be aware—especially, for the student of literature to be aware—that a number of systems and codes, among which language is preeminent,

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exist before the individual subject comes to find his place in them. He can use these codes, play with them: they are part of him. But he is also part of them, and the space of his play is in some measure subject to their rules.

I find a number of confusions in Denis Donoghue's discussion of the concept of play, a term which promotes maximum ambiguity in any case. To the extent that it refers to the limited free play of a system (as we talk of "free play" in a mechanism), it belongs to structural analysis; but it has been more often used to unlock and subvert the systematic, to de-center structure and make all structuration provisional, to open a limitless game of language. I agree with Denis Donoghue that the appeal to play may ultimately trivialize, though we could of course appeal to Freud, to Erikson, and to literature itself to establish a serious function for play. I am more interested, however, in the notion of force, that energy which "provokes form and haunts system," from which, according to Derrida, criticism feels itself separated. If criticism in the wake of structuralism has found itself haunted anew by Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, it is because it has felt itself once again in need of dynamic models (of history, politics, language, mind), models which would not only put history into gear again, but also suggest the transformatory function of human fictions, and their peculiar intimacy with human temporality. There has been a renewal of attention to the place of fiction-making as an institution and an activity, to the dynamics of texts as they are realized in time, to the psychic and social definitions of readership.

That it should be the role and the concept of the reader that has survived, and reemerged from, various structural analyses and deconstructions, seems to me significant and right: it is only the reader who can activate codes and restore the intention of the force that haunts texts. This reader is of course not so much a person—that would lead to a discredited psychologistic criticism—as himself a text, a tissue of codes, a product of the *déjà-lu*. But he is also, to use Mallarmé's term, the "operator" of texts. More than the reader, it is reading that matters. We know precious little about what reading is, but we can probably agree that beyond decoding it brings into play both memory and desire, and that these must then inhabit the text-as-read. Increasingly, I think (and Ricoeur's hermeneutics offers only one possible conceptualization of the situation), it is that transaction between text and reader that occupies us, and we may find ourselves turning increasingly to the model of dialogue as most pertinent to the experience of reading—a move one finds in such diverse examples as Jürgen Habermas, Gérard

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Genette, Jacques Lacan, the revived Mikail Bakhtin. Dialogue is a centerless, reversible structure, yet one that moves forward by a dynamic of reference and interpretation, as well as through metalingual scrutiny of its own codes, and verification of its channels of communication. It is in the nature of discourse, Emile Benveniste suggests, that "I" and "you" are interdependent, and reversible: he who says "I" assumes the whole system of subjectivity coded in the language, then hands it all over to the "you," who in his turn becomes "I." There is no permanent privilege in such a system, and no stability, but there is the possibility of questionings and responses, of supplements and completions, and there is necessarily reciprocity and intersubjectivity. This is not, I think, an impertinent model, nor an impotent one. It may suggest one move toward realization of Proust's injunction, that we become the readers of ourselves.

Edith Kurzweil

Both William Phillips and Denis Donoghue, so far, have indicated that structuralism and poststructuralism, whatever else their merits may be, might not be literary criticism. Denis Donoghue has shown how structuralism has been superseded by philosophy; and he has argued how Paul Ricoeur, who has moved beyond structuralism with the help of semantics, might have incorporated it, successfully, into his hermeneutics. But Ricoeur had argued against structuralism before he concerned himself with linguistics. His real concern, all along, had been with meaning, mostly linked to belief as it manifests itself in everyday life, but inspired, ultimately, by belief in God. So at least one reason why Ricoeur bothered with structuralism was due to the fact that his hermeneutics, built upon a dialectics encompassing all meaning systems, such as Marxism, socialism, and existentialism, had to contend with it. The very prominence of structuralism, in its various incarnations, forced Ricoeur to pay attention, and to make it part of his hermeneutic system. I believe that Ricoeur did, to some extent, what we are doing today: we are discussing an intellectual phenomenon that is spreading like wildfire, or at least like a slow oil spill. And whatever its merits, we cannot ignore it, because we have to estimate its achievements and live with its excitements.

As you all know, I am not a literary critic, but a sociologist—and I

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am aware of having entered the proverbial lion's den. Hence I am approaching the subject from a sociological perspective, which means that I will stress structuralism's principles more than its literary application, and its relation to French culture and politics. I too was fascinated with the structuralist promise when I first read Lévi-Strauss—fascinated enough to spend the last couple of years examining its assumptions, techniques, achievements, and meanings, in history, psychoanalysis, Marxism, *and* literature. Thus I found not only that its cross-disciplinary claims were justified, but that structuralism produced similar reactions and adaptations in a variety of disciplines. As we all know, structural linguistics, in France, provided a system and a method for Parisian intellectuals, replacing Sartrean existentialism. In America, of course, intellectual currents always tend to become more academicized, so structuralism did not immediately catch on. Given its complexities, and its difficulties, structuralism can be of interest only to academics with wide-ranging interests, and can be taught only in the better universities—whatever discipline it invades. Now that it promises to become an industry, as William Phillips also has argued, sociologists have suggested, recently, that its linguistic qualities may be used even to bridge the gap between Marxist, phenomenological, functionalist, and other breeds of sociologists. (In my opinion, this suggestion speaks not so much for the viability of structuralism, as for our knack of recognizing a new academic opportunity.)

But I want to return to its place in literary criticism or to its application to literature for its own ends—ends which have been changing as each structuralism evolved and rejected some of the former premises. For all the so-called structuralists, such as Lévi-Strauss, Althusser, Foucault, Lacan, and Barthes, in very different fashion, have put literature to the service of their own structuralisms. And that is the main reason why both William Phillips and Denis Donoghue have found that structuralists beg the larger, nonlinguistic questions literary critics tend to be concerned with. I would add that the very job of systematizing all the conscious and unconscious connections between the writer and the reader, connections that are made at each reading, etc., puts the emphasis on the system, losing what have been considered the literary qualities of, for instance, *Sarrasine* or *The Purloined Letter.*

It may not be accidental that Denis Donoghue found structuralist literary critics are, for the most part, philosophers, philosophical historians, and linguists: these are the people equipped to deal with macro-questions, and technical ones, in at least a quasi-systematic way.

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But within these disciplines, there is a split between those who by-pass political and social realities and those who address them. With the exception of Althusser, whose structuralism has a very special cast, one is reminded of Marx's dictum that the end of philosophy is the beginning of history. Even when addressing political questions, as Foucault does increasingly, structuralists are more concerned with the language of politics, with its text, or even its intertextuality, than they are with concrete political issues. This is true, also, for Kristeva and Sollers, whose fleeting Maoism in the late 1960s had little to do with the rest of their thinking, and who flirt with politics rather than get involved. But whereas political posturing has its place among French intellectuals, including literary critics, when structuralism is transposed into our American academic settings, the postures lose their original meaning and become intrinsic to the theories. On the other hand, parts of the theories are taken out of context, when they immigrate to this country. In sociology, Foucault's *The Birth of the Clinic*, for instance, is adapted by medical sociologists, his *Discipline and Punish* by criminologists, and *The History of Sexuality* by experts on gender roles—uses which distort Foucault's general intent.

In my opinion, structuralism caught on because a few extraordinary individuals—Foucault, Barthes, and Lacan—picked up Lévi-Strauss's idea of applying Saussure's and Jakobson's linguistics to social facts. They evolved systems by which oppositions, transformations, and relationships that paralleled linguistic categories and/or replaced them, were to explain previously unexplained phenomena—codes of knowledge, "readerly texts," and unconscious language. Foucault, for instance, found new connections between writers such as Cervantes, Flaubert, or Erasmus, painters such as Velazquez or Goya, and uncovered the political and social changes brought on by new methods of production and notions of individual freedom. And historical epochs, according to Foucault, were dominated by specific codes of knowledge, codes that were linked to the emerging dominating powers. Many of Barthes's ideas were taken from, or addressed to, Foucault, although Foucault was equally inspired by Barthes. The notion of regard, or glance, so important in *The Purloined Letter*, and in *Sarrasine*, which deals with who perceives what, and when, was originally elaborated in *The Birth of the Clinic*. The glance was the new diagnostic tool of physicians who, as their scientific knowledge developed, began to take in everything about a patient, his physiognomy, the presenting symptoms of his illness, his social situation, family history, etc. Lacan, of course, uses this glance to make connec-

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tions to the unconscious of his patients, while Barthes applies it to find previously unknown or unnoticed meanings in literary texts.

But long before then, Barthes had strayed from literary criticism. In his *Mythologies*, short pieces originally published as critiques of evolving consumerism, he had been most political, frontally attacking bourgeois society. And his *Système de la mode* had been an attempt to show, with the help of structural linguistics, in how many ways the media penetrates our minds. He simultaneously worked out his *semiologie* and his sociology of fashion. But by 1969, Barthes found that neither of these systems really worked. And he became increasingly concerned with literary texts. This return to literature proper, however, coincided with the events of May-June 1968; it would seem that Barthes along with everyone else had to gain time and distance, in order to absorb what had happened. There also might have been a connection between the return of subjectivity and the failure either to predict or to understand the breakdown of the French political and social system. Though not directly linked to the intellectuals' linguistically oriented systems, this near breakdown did seem to lead them to focus more on ruptures and less on underlying unity. Whatever the reason, however, there was a shift in Barthes's thinking. *Sarrasine*, with its five codes and with the stress on making new connections by new readers, was a novel attempt to break out of the semiologie without invalidating it. And his increasing emphasis on play, on irony, and on uncovering unconscious thoughts in dead authors by live readers, was both an avoidance of political commentary as well as an expression of the acceptance of Lacanian psychoanalysis. For Lacan's lectures, and their publication in the 1960s, bolstered the importance, or the acceptance of playing on words. Lacan's *languisteries*, the multiple meanings of words, as we know, play on linguistic transpositions as well as on free-association. Lacan is more clever than Freud: his connections not only are to uncover an analysand's unconscious, but use Lacan's unconscious for public performances. And performance, as part of the ambiance French intellectuals inhabit, has enhanced literary structuralism and has helped to popularize the work of Lacan and Barthes.

When structuralism is transplanted to America, it lacks this larger intellectual audience. In addition, American Freudians have not reread Freud as a Lacanian text, and with few exceptions, such as the group around *Yale French Studies*, they don't understand the added complexities of unconscious signifiers and signifieds that interact with yet other unconsicous elements, and that have meaning only as relationships. Few people outside Lacan's circle really bother to understand him, a

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fact which serves adherents to rally around him, and detractors to mystify and/or dismiss him. Barthes has taken over many of Lacan's dicta, without, however, spelling them out, or linking them to Freud's writing. And they both are eager to create and/or discover new metalanguages, to discover new meaning. Hence some of the free-associations which in *Barthes by Barthes,* or in *Image Music Text,* appear to be only playful, or outrageous, do have more theoretical validity within the French context. Even the use of "divagations," of a "fragmented" style, take place within the French literary tradition, particularly in the constant concern with Michelet, Racine, and Mallarmé. Along with the emphasis on aphorisms, on metaphors, on transparent signs that are to be "released from bondage," as Donoghue so well stated, the possibility of fragmented readings is to help us relate to Barthes's "texts." It is the French ambiance, I believe, that makes for the success of a new type of reading, of reinventions, and which promises to involve readers actively rather than passively. For reading as a playful activity also parallels the Lacanian relation between the self and the *Other,* that is, the psychoanalytic session. And the popularity of Lacan, who from early on publicly attacked the inequality inherent in the interchange between the knowing analyst and the uninitiated patient, not only helped to establish the usefulness of linguistic categories but also to emphasize the egalitarian notions of structuralism. Lacan, it will be recalled, insisted that a patient is ready to be an analyst when he *feels* ready, and this led to his final break with the International Psychoanalytic Association in 1953. But had he succeeded in training others as well as himself, we would hear the names of Lacanian analysts as frequently as Lacan's, whereas, in fact, Lacan is the charismatic figure who has only acolytes or enemies.

Clearly, the fusion between psychoanalysis, literary criticism, and philosophy, which was meant to serve as mutual enlightenment and to explain the origins of culture and thought, had to become muddled when the unconscious structures no longer promised to surface. (The underlying ideology, that the emerging structures would also demonstrate human equality, however, could not be abandoned along with the original structuralist methodology.) Instead, structuralists concentrated on linguistics, which requires a wide-ranging intellectual background that fewer and fewer people possess, even though structuralists and poststructuralists claimed to speak for the *reader,* that is for the consumer of the texts. I am fairly well read, in a wide range of areas, but I have much trouble with Derrida. And so far, I have had few students, even at the graduate level, who can understand Lévi-Strauss,

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and even fewer who know what Lacan is doing. Maybe English majors are better than sociology majors. Yet, I doubt that many of them are up to the subject; therefore, the democratic pretensions of structuralism remain only pretension. The translation into linguistic categories and relationships of social and cultural phenomena, in its very nature, must create its own jargon. I am reminded of Dwight McDonald's attack on sociological jargon—probably one of the clearest statements not only of some differences between sociology and literary criticism, but of the importance of clarity. The French, previously known for their attachment to *clarté* forgot it when they succumbed to structuralism, as did some American literary critics. Sometimes, it seems as if the common jargon—of the various disciplines—is the element that will reunite our intellectual universe. Still, behind the jargon is a new method, one that is bound to appeal to critics looking for an underlying principle not only of literary texts but of all knowledge. But when we cannot seem to agree about ends, the means, themselves, become the end.

RUDI CARDONA: We have exactly thirty-five minutes for a reply from Denis Donoghue and for discussion from the participants.

DENIS DONOGHUE: I'd like to take up just one point which is clearly the main subject of tension between Peter Brooks and myself, and that is the question of whether I wasn't unnecessarily moralizing the landscape of the entire subject. If I've done that, it's because it's temperamentally congenial to me to do so. I tend to be a pretty moralistic type of person, and certainly a pretty moralistic kind of critic. So I wouldn't regard such criticism as terribly damaging. I'm surprised, though, by way of rebuttal, by Peter Brooks, who says on the one hand that there is indeed an ideology of structuralism and yet that somehow this ideology is not to be discussed. But what else does moralizing the subject mean, except picking it up on the level at which it indeed is ideological, and teasing out the ideological implications? It seems to me that that is exactly what moralizing the subject means.

It was also, I thought, significant, that he picked out my otherwise harmless phrase, that the structuralists resent something or other. I would now pick out his not at all harmless phrase that structuralism is best understood as a set of actions and gestures. Well, now, I would vary. I would rush to meet that terminology because it

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seems to me that if you concede that that is the way in which structuralism most clearly reveals itself, then all I need is the word "act" and the word "gesture," and, as a moralist, I think I'm pretty well home. Or, if he concedes that the subject is to be discussed in terms of acts and gestures, then I think we can have some useful combat there. Now, again, I noticed he used the phrase "the ethical context." I think ethical is a bit extreme. I didn't propose any ethical question. A moral question, yes, in the sense in which perhaps Lionel Trilling used the word "morals" in relation to manners and the normal. But is seems to me indisputable that structuralism is not philosophically neutral. It is no more philosophically neutral than it is politically neutral. And if structuralism on the whole has found it very easy to imply, and indeed to engineer a politics, it seems to me that it's a very swift step until it engineers and deploys a philosophy, and perhaps even a much-hated metaphysics.

As to the last part of his comment, in regard to dialogue, I not only welcome that passage, but, in fact I welcome it because I've just finished a book about dialogue. With some embarrassment, I must confess it's called *Dialogue of One,* but that is primarily because I choose that passage in Donne's poem "The Ecstasy" where that phrase comes from, "dialogue of one," to meditate some of the embarrassments involved in dialogue as such—the notion of monologue, dialogue, soliloquy, and so on.

PETER BROOKS: I don't mean to say that structuralism is without implicit ideology. I said it had that; it has lots of them. I don't think that it is philosophically innocent, but that it's philosophically naive. I don't think that most people who did the interesting structuralist work were trained as philosophers or qualify as philosophers, and I think trying to extract their implicit philosophy is not the most useful way to go about trying to understand what structuralism is. That's why I talked about gestures, and I don't think acts was my word, but activity. It's a kind of mental and critical activity which, it seems to me, characterizes structuralism. Now, this is to confess that the work of structuralists that I find interesting is the work done by people like Barthes, Todorov and Genette, and that some of Foucault's wilder speculations on the end of man strike me as trivial, because that is precisely what Foucault is doing when he carries on about the end of man: trying to turn structuralism into a philosophy, and the results are, I think, simply trivial. And there we might be in agreement.

RUDI CARDONA: To open up the discussion, and maybe to join this

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morning's session with this afternoon's first session, we should invite both Lawrence Graver and William Phillips to begin the discussion or commentary from the participants.

LAWRENCE GRAVER: I have a naive question; it may be a forced naïveté, but the question is, what is the critical edge of structuralism? What is the weight of the word "critical" or "criticism," when we speak of a structuralist criticism? That is, in listening to the presentations, I recognize in structuralism, as presented by Denis Donoghue, a lot of philosophical ideas. For example, the denaturalism is clearly connected to Husserl's idea of ontological reduction. It seems to me there's a hidden dialectical methodology operating in the dualistic conception, and so forth. I accept all that, but what is the critical cutting edge of locating the text, say, entirely in a world of language? Language strikes me as funny, and it strikes me that a lot of text has the same relation to this thing called reality which we're not supposed to ontologize as the expression *Arbeit macht frei* has to Auschwitz in some sense. In other words, we have this text, *Arbeit macht frei*, work makes us free, and then we have the reality of the concentration camp. We have all these literary texts, and then we have this thing called the reality of the world. Now it may be very hard to say what the reality of that world is, but, on the other hand, in some gross ways, we can say what the reality of that world is. I would like to know what the value of a structuralist analysis of a text would be for helping me to understand the referencing power of a text. Does structuralism accept the referencing power of a text? How would structuralism deal with the text *Arbeit macht frei*, for example, in the Auschwitz situation?

DENIS DONOGHUE: Well, structuralists, I think, would accept the referentiality, but would not be very much interested in it. They would say, that is not our concern; we take that for granted. They would say, that is not part of the kind of criticism which our structuralism makes possible. It seems to me that structuralism would be, if you like, an opening or a way in. It would be a chosen way into a text or a way of taking possession of a text under certain auspices or a certain spirit. You could describe these auspices in various ways, and you could certainly describe the structuralist spirit in various ways. But for me, one of the perennial problems—putting aside the structuralist question—is affecting an exit with as much agility as one had affected entry. It's also, I think, correspondingly the point at which one would have difficulty establishing not so much what the procedure is, but its seriousness. How do you make a

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structuralist question into the kind of serious question which would inhabit a universe in which Auschwitz would be an indisputable fact? At that point, it seems to me, structuralism not only discloses its limits, but we reach a tragic embarrassment, not knowing how to move from the kind of skills negotiated by structuralism and the other skills which structuralism either ignores, or simply chooses to transcend.

PETER BROOKS: If you're going to raise the question of Auschwitz, you're not going to talk simply about the limitations of structuralism, but of literary criticism and of human discourse in general. That seems to me not an example I would have called upon to deal with in terms of justifying structuralism or justifying the activity of literary criticism. But I don't disagree with what Denis Donoghue said. Structuralism is clearly designed precisely to make the movement from the world of words to the world of reality a difficult one, and to explore the ramifications and the structures, the complications of the world of words, before one engages in the question of reference. What it really comes down to, I think, and here the last paragraph in Denis Donoghue's paper was very relevant, is the different tasks of criticism. One thing that bothered me in your question, and bothered me in William Phillips's talk this morning, was the assumption that the goals of criticism have to be textual exegesis and evaluation. I think criticism is called upon to do many other things, and indeed textual exegesis and evaluation are only rather recent roles that have fallen to criticism. The concept of illuminating the language of literature, its rhetorical operations, is really an older task for criticism, the grounds on which we read texts. And it seems to me here structuralism makes a very strong claim. I think a lot of the confusions of this morning came from the feeling that the only kind of criticism is both exegetical and judgmental. I don't buy that. There's rhetoric, there's criticism that talks about models of human understanding, for instance.

CLEMENT GREENBERG: That's not criticism, that's description.

PETER BROOKS: It seems to me it's a necessary part of literary criticism. If you're going to take that stance, you'll have to argue that Aristotle is not a literary critic.

CLEMENT GREENBERG: That's quite true.

PETER BROOKS: You can say that, but he's certainly more useful to literary criticism than most literary critics.

CLEMENT GREENBERG: Let's say structuralism is a preparation for literary criticism, a means of seizing the object, of grasping the object, one among many. But it's not criticism per se.

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PETER BROOKS: Well, I would say it's not interpretive criticism; it's poetics.

CLEMENT GREENBERG: Oh, no, poetics is not criticism; poetics is description.

PETER BROOKS: Poetics is a branch of literary criticism, without which literary criticism can't very well do. . . .

CLEMENT GREENBERG: What is necessary is not sufficient. This may be necessary, but it's not sufficient. Aristotle's poetics are a criticism, by the way. But his poetics are mostly descriptive, and description, as such, especially the description of structures, is not criticism. Now I'm not quibbling about a word. I'm quibbling about an activity. If it is a quibble.

PETER BROOKS: You're defining an activity in what I would see as one of its branches, a very fruitful branch, but one which perhaps threatened to take over the whole of criticism. We were inundated, we still are in the universities, with interpretive criticisms, readings of texts. The one thing we need is some way to order that, and to understand on what basis it is going forward.

CLEMENT GREENBERG: Well and true, but it's still not criticism. I insist on that. It becomes linguistics; it becomes rhetoric; it becomes quintillian; that's what it becomes. But it's not criticism. And I am mystified when I read the structuralists as to where the foundation blocks are really being placed. Where can you set foot? I haven't been enlightened.

PETER BROOKS: If you conceive of criticism without those foundation activities, it seems that criticism quickly renders itself invalid.

CLEMENT GREENBERG: Let's say Dr. Johnson's criticism.

PETER BROOKS: He was precisely interested in questions of poetics and rhetoric.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: To pick up Peter Brooks's phrase about the maximizing of confusion, I think there might be some questions as to what the sources of confusion are. And obviously we have some differences of opinion as to where the sources of confusion are. There's a central question here, which is being evaded. The central question is the relation of what is referred to as structuralism—regardless of how we define it—to what used to be considered criticism. I don't think that we gain anything by becoming pluralists, by becoming permissive, in effect by saying anything that anybody does is criticism. There has been a traditional idea of criticism which happens to include Dr. Johnson too as one of the first and early practitioners. It was an activity that had the following characteristics: one evaluated a book—I'm going to try to avoid the

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word "text," a text is another way of getting us away from literature—that is, one evaluated a book, deciding whether it was good or bad. One decided whether it was good or bad to some extent by exercising one's personal taste and judgment, to some extent comparatively, by relating it to other works in the history of our civilization, not other civilizations, also relating it to other elements and forces in the culture.

Now, in my opinion—this you may quarrel with—the primary paradigm, if you want to call it that, of criticism, is actually one performed by people who are creating works in the same genre. And that is, that when a novelist reads a novel or a painter looks at a painting, what he is doing is thinking of that work in terms of its accomplishment, both in terms of the history of the medium and in terms of the history of other elements and forces within our culture. That is its meaning for him.

To shift for a moment; I think we're double talking, and the double talk is a kind of idiomatic term for tautology. That is, we keep talking about language. We're going to examine the language. What do we do when we examine the language? What critical ideas, concepts, judgments, relations to the culture as a whole do we arrive at when we are examining the language? Suppose we take a common work. Everybody here has read *Portnoy's Complaint.* What happens when you examine the language? You'll discover that it's a mixture of classical American, literary English, Jewish vernacular, and certain elements of jargon picked up, that is the jargonization of the language in the last few decades. It's of interest, but I don't see where else you go from there. I think we're constantly begging the question when we say it is useful to examine it; it is necessary to see language as part of literature. Well, that's a tautology. Of course language is literature, and literature is language, but we never answered the question, "What is criticism?" As I tried to suggest this morning, the old ideas of criticism are defunct; they're obsolete. We have to have new ideas of criticism. One can argue that, and I would be prepared to argue that, and I think some of you might guess the position that I might take in that argument. But, on the other hand, we're blowing up the argument by saying that there are different types of criticism, that there are different types of thinking, different types of approaching things, and let's examine this and let's examine that.

PETER BROOKS: Can I just make one remark, not attempting to answer all that William Phillips said? I agree that I'm opposed to the blurring of distinctions and lines, and I hoped that what I was doing,

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partly, in my comments, was trying to reinforce distinctions when I said that structuralism, as I understand it, does not claim to be an interpretive or hermeneutic activity, but rather to illuminate questions of poetics and rhetoric. That is, how genres work, and how the language works, and so on. I would say, and here we would have to have a historical argument, that that is at least as old and noble a tradition in the study of literature, as evaluative criticism. If you go back to neoclassical critics, one of the interesting things is that the rules they are using are both normative and poetic. They are normative, they are also recipes for the way a tragedy, for instance, is put together. I just think what you are doing is taking one province of what has been known in the study of literature and claiming this is all that's valid. I am saying that that needs to be informed by study of some of the larger issues raised in the other branches. I don't mind if you want to call them rhetoric, poetics, whatever, rather than literary criticism, but I don't think you have exclusive claim to your kind of criticism as the only kind of literary criticism.

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Teaching of Literature

NORMAN BIRNBAUM: I'm a member of the editorial board of *Partisan Review*. The theme of this discussion is the teaching of literature and other arts. Our speaker is Donald Marshall, professor of English and comparative literature, and chairman of the program in literature, science, and the arts, at the University of Iowa. The commentators are Alan Trachtenberg, professor of English at Yale University, and Roger Shattuck from the University of Virginia.

Donald Marshall

It was in the concrete situation of teaching that my adolescent delight in the grandiose abstractions of philosophy matured into a more disciplined study of critical theory. Learning to teach and critical theory seemed connected. And so they had been for New Criticism—the method I had absorbed not as a theory, but as a practice, in undergraduate and graduate courses. In fact, New Criticism originated with a pedagogical problem: how do you talk about literature in a classroom? The teacher can, of course, lecture, conveying information and informed judgments about works. And to do so is neither easy nor irrelevant, for presumably he has skillfully sifted out important facts and has had a long time to consider his judgments. But the New Critics began teaching at a time when the literary community's canons of taste were changing dramatically and when a new kind of poetry was being written, a kind so complicated and ambiguous that you could not take for granted the student's ability to read and understand it. The pedagogic problem the New Critics uncovered beneath the anecdotal style of literary history and the invocation of secure canons of taste, was that students didn't know how to read very well (and in some cases, neither did their teachers). The solution they found was to concentrate on how to read a poem, and in particular, to fashion a way of reading that corresponded to the nature of poetry itself. In a sense, the teacher was to help the student see that the poem itself taught you how to read

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it. Having reconceived the nature of a poem, the New Critic in the classroom fell back on the minimal elements of learning to read. In the first place, you insist that the poem is a piece of language. After all, if teacher and student talk to each other, they must have a common language, the same language as the poem. And second, since we are talking with each other, we are in one kind of dramatic situation. The poem is the record of another dramatic situation, and we can use our social self-awareness to recreate its tones and shifting attitudes. I think it is no accident that this method flourished just when the students and admission procedures of the best universities changed after World War II. The new students were bright and ambitious and were chosen on the basis of general intellectual ability, validated by verbal and mathematical aptitude tests. If you got into Harvard, you had lots of verbal aptitude. You might never have read the Bible or Horace; you might now know a word of Latin; seventeenth-century British history might be a total blank. But faced with Marvell's "Horatian Ode on the Return of Cromwell from Ireland," considered purely as a piece of language crystallizing a dramatic experience, you could find plenty to say about it.

This approach, centered on reading "the text itself," has fragmented. On the one side, critics have liberated the drama of the classroom. They want to hear from the reader, and to generate in a class a free conversation not restricted by the objectivity of the text. We have certain varieties of "reader-oriented" criticism. On the other hand, the philosophy of language has become steadily more sophisticated, until we have arrived at deconstruction, the last turn of the self-conscious rhetorical screw. I do not claim that these two extremes evolved out of New Criticism. But they emerge into a critical and classroom practice still dominated by New Criticism, and their wide influence and acceptance is due, I think, to the fact that they carry the key elements of New Criticism to a logical, but still recognizable extreme. Because reader-oriented criticism and deconstruction seem to me most likely to influence the teaching of literature in the next decade or two, and because both seem to me fundamentally wrong, I want to consider them, necessarily briefly.

Reader-response criticism, of course, varies widely. Norman Holland and David Bleich draw on psychoanalysis and focus on real people actually reading. Roland Barthes revels in the private pleasure of the text and the erotics of reading. Stanley Fish drifts a little, but seems finally to propose a rhetorically ideal reader, self-conscious but restricted to the single dimension of the text's temporal sequence, like Pope's spider, who "lives along the line." Michael Riffaterre cautions

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that only some linguistic or rhetorical features are actually perceived and finds in criticism a record of which these are for the most competent readers. Hans Robert Jauss conducts historical research into readers' responses as they vary over time. This is not an exhaustive or neat classification of current varieties. To my mind, the important division is between the introspected subjectivity of an actual, empirical reader and any rhetorical projection of an "implied" reader out of the text itself. Only the former decisively breaks with New Criticism. I will therefore concentrate on Norman Holland, whose significance lies precisely in showing what happens when you pass over the barrier to subjectivity set up by objective rhetorical analysis.

Holland presents his theory in two books, *Poems in Persons: An Introduction to the Psychoanalysis of Literature* (1973) and *Five Readers Reading* (1975). He confesses his early fascination with New Criticism, which he gave up because he kept running up against one fact: "Wherever one exchanges critical interpretations—in the classroom, learned journals, literary quarterlies, professional meetings, or casual conversation—one finds that different readers read differently and there seems to be no way of laying the differences to rest." Psychoanalysis seemed to Holland the richest and most promising approach to the variety subjectivity generates. It teaches us two things about the "reader": he is an organism in quest "for pleasure in response to the multiple demands on the ego"; and this quest is shaped and controlled by an "identity theme." The "identity theme" is "the invariant that one can abstract from all of an individual's behavior." It "defines the organism's criterion for acceptable and unacceptable solutions" to his quest for pleasure. The reader is thus a pleasure seeker limited by an invariant identity theme. In encountering a story—or indeed any reality—the reader admits into his psyche "only what precisely matches" his defenses. Once admitted, the "story becomes swept up in the general press every human being has toward gratification." Elaborated in wish-fulfilling fantasies which are characteristic for the individual, the fantasized story is then transformed by "higher" ego functions into a synthesized intellectual product which is, again, characteristic for this particular ego and pleasing to it. Holland concludes, "The individual (considered as the continuing creator of variations on an identity theme) relates to the world as he does to a poem or a story: he uses its physical reality as grist with which to re-create himself, that is, to make yet another variation in his single, enduring identity."

Holland's is, I think, one of many efforts to boost the private

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person's feeling of importance and power in an era of bureaucracy and vast, impersonal forces. Here at last is someone who takes me seriously, and it turns out to be my English teacher. This is not just a cynical calculation that an economically sinking profession can gain fresh infusions of capital by merging with the flourishing new industry of psychotherapy. The subjective critic is sincerely convinced that he is helping liberate the student and put him in touch with his experiences. Moreover, subjectivism hopes to reduce the rancor among teachers of literature that seems only to be exacerbated by rational debate. For professional status and rewards are now the exclusive privilege of those with authority, and argument is the weapon for seizing and holding the power of authority. Instead of competing by means of argument to push my reading into the place yours holds, we can all share the wealth in a spirit of tolerance. One learns to say, "Well, I can hear where you're coming from, but personally I feel I can't assimilate your reading into my recreation of my invariant identity theme."

New Criticism liberated classroom discussion by setting aside the authority of the poet and the authority of the scholar. What prevented anarchy was an explicitly moral submission to the public objectivity of meaning. In practice, meaning was a flexible, organic unity that embraced and reconciled opposites: the compensation for self-restraint was that even the humblest reader could add his mite to the endlessly unfolding objective meaning of a poem. Subjective criticism asserts that "objective meaning" is a mystification, a factitious unity imposed under the authority of a teacher who disciplines his students into the alienated consciousness called "irony." Liberated from the burden of meaning, subjective criticism falls back on introspection and the seeming certitude of private experience. Since objective meaning is always a silent partner in the dialogue of the classroom, subjective criticism exorcises this ghost and calls for free conversation among the persons actually present, rejecting any appeal to a higher, absent authority or any responsibility to outside persons or institutions. You may hear in this, as I do, a voice from the sixties and a fresh proof that like philosophy, literary theory always comes after the feast. The shock is to hear a broad prophecy of social and personal liberation dwindle into this subjectivist jargon.

Deconstruction attacks the claims of "objective meaning" from the opposite side, that is, from the perspective of a sophisticated theory of language. I have neither the space nor the intention to describe this complex theory in detail. In practice, the deconstructor begins by positing a naive conception of meaning: a text states something, and

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the something corresponds to reality or else to what the author intended. The reader should try to recover this meaning correctly. The deconstructor then undertakes a minute and rigorous analysis of a particular text and shows that it in fact contains contradictions which make it impossible to project a single coherent meaning from it. Instead of capturing a referential object or an authorial intention, the text is entangled in the network of its own rhetorical organization. It obscures this entanglement only by the willful suppression of one term of the contradiction it contains. The critic's task is to dissect the unique way that a particular text accomplishes this obscuring, and thus "deconstruct" texts one by one. Paul de Man puts his theory aphoristically: "every text is an allegory of its own unreadability." When the New Critics outlawed intentional fallacies, affective fallacies, and heresies of paraphrase, the text was all that remained. They then argued that texts were parables of their own creation, thus assuring that the text was self-constituting as a unified totality, a meaning that could not be rephrased, but could be directly experienced. Deconstruction eliminates this last refuge of meaning. There is no solid text, just the unending free play of signs or figures of speech. Yet to one trained up in New Criticism, this sounds very much like an extreme version of the heresy of paraphrase.

It is not easy to refute deconstruction as a theory. For one thing, it describes accurately enough the naive and unexamined sense of "meaning" nearly everybody works with most of the time. And ever since Socrates, philosophers have had little trouble showing the logical embarrassments of everyday opinion. Nevertheless, there are replies to deconstruction, and I think Charles Altieri has stated them very convincingly in a recent series of articles. Essentially, the reply runs, we need not reduce ourselves to two choices: either words transparently convey meanings or else engage in an endless freeplay. When skepticism pushes naive theory into defending itself, both agree to accept the exaggerated conception of rigorous meaning naive theory proposes in its self-defense, when other views are possible. Thus, Derrida asks, "Is it certain that to the word *communication* corresponds a concept that is unique, univocal, rigorously controllable, and transmittable: in a word, communicable?" The naive realist, sensing that if he denies this, he will deny "communication," answers belligerently, "Yes!" But we might also answer, "No, but why should you expect it to? If you couldn't give one, would you be unable to use the word?"

But again, untangling critical theory from deconstruction will require serious arguments not possible here. I will mention, though,

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that when Derrida praises his friends, he tells us that their translation is "rigorous and faithful." When he wishes to attack his critics, he insists that they have distorted his writing by omitting "important" parts or not attending to the "clear signals" the text contained, signals designed to prevent our blurring an important distinction it draws. Or he heaps withering scorn on his opponent for resorting to "woolly approximations."

Likewise, I cannot here present an argument against Paul de Man's move from the claim that the distinctive curse of all language is that its signs never coincide with its signifiers to the conclusion that the human self is a void, a nothingness, and that literature is the persistent and unmystified naming of this nothingness. But since my mode here is reminiscence, I will recall that I have heard not an antagonist, but a devotee of de Man ask him whether his own text was not an allegory of its own unreadability, and where that left its claim to be "about," say, Rousseau. De Man's reply, annoyance audible in his voice, was that his own work didn't interest him. If someone else wanted to deconstruct it, that was fine with him, but he wanted to talk about Rousseau. This seems a fair enough retort to such a question: one ought to be reminded that the deconstruction lies in the actual, painstaking analysis, not in leaping to conclusions. But on the other hand, the question has its rights. Is the decision about where you choose to stop deconstructing simply a matter of personal interest?

Subjective criticism has already become a pedagogy. Deconstruction has not yet, though in France, Derrida has been actively concerned with reforming education along lines consistent with his theories. In fact, like any method, deconstruction is eminently teachable, especially to graduate students already trained by New Criticism. I can foresee that it could become a new rhetorical technology, complete with special vocabulary and recommended procedures, though such a reduction would presumably miss the real point of deconstruction. Alternatively, it may be possible to deconstruct the classroom situation itself. an exercise I predict will be perceived and appreciated by only a very few, very bright students.

I do not intend here to develop an alternative critical theory and deduce a pedagogy from it. Instead, I want to mention some elements of thinking in a classroom which I have come to prize in teacher and student alike.

The first element is an evidentiary cast of mind, an appetite for sheer information. The term "fact" obviously covers a wide spectrum along scales of comprehensiveness and generality. A "fact" may

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contain a good deal of convention: rules for spelling or punctuation, the correct form for a footnote, parliamentary procedure. To establish a positive fact is frequently difficult, and in its nature no fact can be certain. The anchoring model is therefore negative, the case where the demonstration of error is swift and decisive. What I want to praise is a virtually instinctive preference for statements rich in facts and for arguments constantly dependent on facts, a preference accompanied by distrust of statements notably thin in factual claims and by a readiness to give up large views and ingenious theories which contain demonstrable error. Along with this, I want to praise a willingness to venture factual statements and be embarrassed if they prove wrong, with no attempt to evade that risk by seeking in advance some higher logical ground. This attitude leads to looking things up in dictionaries and encyclopedias, reading the notes to a text, consulting history with wide-ranging curiosity, or when a point of critical theory is in question, clarifying not with an imaginary, but with a real and pertinent example. The true value here is a discriminating sense of the sort of claim evidence ought to decide and of the potential existence of that evidence. A mind nourished on this sense will not feel submission to fact as depressing its freedom, but will feel rather the power conferred by engagement with actualities.

The second element is memory. I grew up in an era which looked on memory and fact both as enemies of spontaneous creativity. Memorizing poetry was a waste of time. What mattered was not remembering, but "knowing where to look it up." Since "the facts" changed constantly, why bother to remember any? Exam writers scorned "regurgitation," and claimed the student should "learn" even from taking an exam. To be unable to forget was self-evidently a curse, the theme of stories calculated to produce a metaphysical *frisson*. And yet modern literature is inconceivable without memory: think of Proust, Broch, Faulkner. Learning a foreign language is almost entirely a feat of memory: you do not discover the uses of the subjunctive by reasoning. Memory may not be the same as intelligence, but in this case, it does what intelligence cannot. And surely memory is a *part* of intelligence. Real history emerges when individuals take upon themselves the responsibility of embodying the past through their memories and thus open their own lives to the continuing effects of that memory. Memory is the agency for constructing an extended self, whose experience and responsibilities are not just personal.

The final element I will call "committed thinking." Thinking begins in the willingness to hold a view firmly and long enough to test

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it against evidence and contrary opinion. Many of my students can, with considerable effort, muster an opinion. But when questioned, they either abandon their view and adopt what they guess I think; or they lapse into uncommunicative privacy, with the parting remark, "Well, that's my opinion." This deficiency in thinking is sad commentary on their previous education and mental lives. Despite the conventional view, the problem is not that their memories have been stuffed with useless facts. In general, they have been left complete blanks. The problem is that their education left them afloat on a sea of personal opinion, stubbornly held, where any argumentative grappling for agreement or disagreement on rational ground seemed merely hostile. Moreover, the serious discussion of important issues will not flourish if it is detached from those books which have earned their designation as classics. If I try to answer the question, "What is a good society?" in ignorance of Plato—and I can try to do this—my answer is likely to be narrow and impoverished. But at the same time, if I try to read Plato without any thought of my own about justice, I will simply not understand what he says.

One additional matter may be seen either as a coda or a corollary to what I have already said. For 2000 years, it was clear to everybody that to study literature meant to produce it. I am not alluding to the ingenious claim of contemporary theory that there is no difference in principle between literature and criticism. I mean that when you read Vergil, you construed the syntax and named the rhetorical figures in every line, and then you went away and wrote some hexameters of your own. Doubtless much bad poetry resulted, and where a schoolmaster imposed the classics as rigid models, great harm was done: we hear about men of otherwise sound mind who took care never to use in Latin a word not found in Cicero. But still, the study of literature and the writing of literature went hand in hand. Is the modern dictum really true, that we cannot teach literature, only literary criticism? Should literary theory work out its problems in a region of pure speculation severed from production? Teaching literature is not just an issue of critical theory, but also an issue of social and political analysis.

Hence I want to suggest some commitments, if that is the right word, I think a teacher of literature should consider making. The first is a willingness to identify himself with certain larger interests—without dogmatism, one hopes, but without apology either. By "larger interest," I mean, for example, the truth (which entails more than "incidental correctness"). I think I recognize the dangers in suggesting that an individual might acknowledge the authority of truth and then

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identify his own conviction with it. He risks arrogance, error perpetrating itself on the innocent with smug assurance. There is no absolute truth, Derrida insists, for who would decide it? After a century of murderous dogmatism, skepticism seems positively a moral duty. But is this sufficient? Isn't *some* truth going to prevail, and isn't the question rather which truth and by what means? Consider basic political rights: due process of law, equal protection, the various freedoms listed in the first ten amendments of the United States Constitution. Is it really better to treat these with skepticism? If we are going to think and talk at all, we need to hold some view and hold it seriously, making for it a claim not merely personal, but potentially universal. Otherwise, we simply don't engage each other at all. A different aspect of identifying oneself with a "larger interest" is an identification with institutions. In my experience, the legacy of the last decade, at least at the middle rank of the profession, is a profound reluctance to accept and exercise institutional responsibility and authority. Even where individuals work within institutions, they keep a certain psychic distance, much as Thomas Buddenbrooks runs the family firm, but without the spontaneous conviction his father felt. Yet for all our justified distrust of them, institutions are the only way truth can be translated into political and social action. And again, the question is not whether there will be acting institutions, but rather, what actions will they take and on what principles?

The way to temper this first commitment is with a second, to that pluralism envisioned by a great and neglected thinker, William James. He did not—and I do not—mean an atomic fragmentation whose outer limit is solipsism. I mean something like the idea of "legitimate opposition," a residual resistance to totalization that keeps actual the possibility of alternatives. What characterizes this middle ground is the legitimacy of dispute and the legitimacy of rhetoric as a disputacious discourse neither skeptical nor authoritarian, but possessing its own truth.

One final commitment may be the most important, though it is, I think, the least thought about. Erich Auerbach described the situation of his own work as a reflection on European civilization made possible by its occurrence at precisely the moment before that civilization ends as a distinct entity and is gradually engulfed in a more comprehensive unity. Paul Ricoeur argues that such an engulfment will be based on a "creative confrontation" between cultures, the unpredictable merging of traditions through the activities of thinkers genuinely open to more than one. He gives as an example the confrontation between Greek and

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Hebraic culture on which Western European civilization itself rests. Such a creative merging of traditions cannot be planned or anticipated. Nor is it inevitable or automatic: it would be easy to imagine the liquidation of all traditions, and a civilization based essentially on scientific technology and "mass," or more accurately, "consumer" culture. This is a momentous and decisive question for teachers of literature in the United States. The answer does not lie either in eclecticism, nor in the cultural equivalent of ethnic neighborhoods. Each of us will doubtless need to become immersed in non-Western culture. But if we find an answer, it will come from a deep and authentic grasp of our own cultural situation and tradition and of the possibilities they open.

Alan Trachtenberg

Donald Marshall poses a question which in its apparent simplicity seems to gather to itself all the pathos of a most peculiar profession: "How do you talk about literature in a classroom?" To profess a desire for such talk—and by talk he clearly means the give-and-take of conversation—is already to confess a double vulnerability: to place oneself aslant two uncertainties, what is called "literature," let us say the "text," and the classroom: itself only an empty form with a shifting, indeterminate content. And to assume this ambiguous posture—ambiguous in that no inner necessity flows from either literary text or classroom that they conjoin—for the sake of achieving a third entity, a talk, a conversation, a give-and-take, in which "the teacher might also learn something."

This third entity, the desired product of the engagement between "text" and "classroom" mediated by "teacher," is surely the most problematic goal of any in the higher reaches of the higher learning in America. Is it "knowledge" that one wishes to achieve by "talk about literature in a classroom?" Knowledge of what (assuming that the verb to know is a vacant formalism without an object)? The literary text? And what precisely do we mean by *knowing* a text? Or is it "literature" as such, an ideal form possessed by all texts that claim "literary" as a definitive adjective? But how is such a claim filed, in what office of final authority? And can we begin to grasp the literary without grasping at the same time its presumed opposite, the nonliterary, the

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text that lies outside the apparent subject one wishes to talk about, "literature." Or is it perhaps the talk itself, the talking-about, the putative conversation, that is the goal, the demonstrable product of the teacher's work? The work of producing talk: is this the peculiar distinction of the "teaching of literature?"

In short Donald Marshall's opening question—simple, bold, one might say in the best sense innocent—opens immediately upon all the imponderables of a precarious profession. What does the teacher of literature profess? Does he have a real subject? Where does it lie? I find admirable Donald Marshall's rejection of theories of the literary text which deny the possibility of "meaning." He wishes to retain a notion of an objective meaning, a "truth"—but is it a truth *about* the text, or within it? And if the teacher in his talking about literature is talking about meaning, does he confine himself to an explication, a technical work of logical exegesis? If meaning resides *in* the text, is the teacher's role no more than that of a hermeneutical technician? If it lies, or arises, to any degree outside the text—that is, in consciousness at a moment when the mind is free of utter and absolute submission to the coercion of the text itself, then how do we apprehend it and identify it as belonging (somehow) to both text and reader? And if meaning is a product of some work that includes more than "reading" itself—the work of an additional, supplemental discourse called interpretation (whether performed privately or in the classroom)—is it the teacher's work to teach (literally, to show) methods of interpretation, ways of achieving confidence that a reading is plausible, complete, and coherent with the quiddity of the text? The "evidentiary cast of mind" Donald Marshall values presumably replies positively: yes, among the desired goals of the professing of literature is a respect for logical clarity, for validity of statement, for the casting out of error. Which can only mean that talking about literature in a classroom requires a metalanguage of rational skepticism in the form of operational techniques. "Memory" and "committed thinking" similarly represent for Donald Marshall external characteristics of the product of his labor as teacher: it is not the achievement of meaning alone then, that characterizes the classroom engagement with a text, but meaning in the service of a kind of thinking: a clear thinking that not only stands up for itself, but for its precedents retained in memory: a thinking that is not a forgetting.

Now who can gainsay the value of these ends? But one wonders if they are not among the ends of what we mean by humane education as a whole—not the exclusive, distinguishing signs of literary study as such, but in fact the qualities of mind that literary study presupposes at

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the outset. Moreover, one might wonder even further whether literary study is in fact the most favorable occasion for the teaching (the manifesting) of this Enlightenment notion of thinking. What literature, what specific texts, does Donald Marshall have in mind? *Finnegans Wake*? *The Cantos*? *Moby Dick*? *Heart of Darkness*? The inherent modern difficulty of saying what the real subject of classroom talk about literature really is becomes doubly difficult when "literature" remains as abstract as it does in Donald Marshall's paper—a form as empty of genuine content as the term "classroom." We may all take for granted (one hopes for exceptions among us) that the term refers to things we commonly recognize as poems, novels, plays—authored by figures who through some process that precedes our own reading have been singled out, named, as worthy of classroom talk. The term literature translates in practice as texts deemed "great" by our own teachers, and theirs before them, judgments confirmed by dense apparatus of publishing, distributing, reviewing, and curriculum making. The judgments may be correct; and Arnoldian vision may indeed inform the paperback industry which in turn supports the apparent democratization of the classrooms of higher learning Donald Marshall alludes to. But still, the specific content of our presumed subject, "literature," remains a blank in his argument. And if by chance the subject is "modern literature," then surely the valued ends of committed thinking and so on face a particular resistance. "The disenchantment of our culture with culture itself," "the bitter line of hostility to civilization"—these challenges to the implied values of the very enterprise of humane learning (as it is constituted in the apparent "free space" of the classroom) Lionel Trilling identified as the very "shaping and controlling ideas of our epoch," "the characteristic element of modern literature." Certainly no one will charge Trilling with a secret bent toward "deconstruction." But in his essay first published in *Partisan Review* in 1961, "On the Teaching of Modern Literature," what else is he saying but that the full force of meaning in Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, Proust, Freud, Mann, Eliot itself deconstructs any complacent assurance about certainty, truth, memory—or at least, it *should*. Trilling's great essay takes its occasion from its own pathos: it should, but the classroom intervenes all-powerfully: "I asked them to look into the Abyss," Trilling wrote with a note of despair, "and, both dutifully and gladly, they have looked into the Abyss, and the Abyss has greeted them with the grave courtesy of all objects of serious study, saying: 'Interesting, am I not? And *exciting*, if you consider how deep I am and what dread beasts lie at my bottom. Have it well in mind that a

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knowledge of me contributes to your being whole, or well-rounded, men.'"

I am not arguing that all literature compels us to the Abyss, but only that we cannot speak of *teaching* literature without a concrete notion of the particular intellectual, moral, emotional—and political—urgencies embodied in our specific texts. To speak of "text" only as a verbal construct, not as a moral enterprise and a political event, is hardly the way to surpass any of the theories that deny a discussable meaning. And while Trilling is before us, I cite him again to underscore another view I share: that "literary situations" are "cultural situations." And that we cannot grasp the text in ignorance of its situation in the world, except at the risk of trivializing it into a verbal game. And if teaching consists of resituating the text from world to classroom, then classroom becomes a new or additional grounding of the work, a new place for the apprehension of meaning, a new social and cultural situation for the literary event. Here seems to me to lie the peculiarity—and the extraordinary richness—of the subject: to talk about literature is inevitably to talk about what literature itself talks about. To engage it as an event in culture, in society, in history, is to engage all that is implied by it, all that is compacted within it—not only the breadth and depth of its allusions, but its special pressures upon private existence. These are not natural facts we have to deal with, but cultural facts: not crystals for analysis but formed interpretations of being which lend themselves to, which demand, further interpretation—not only of themselves but of our own beings through them.

Talking about literature in the classroom should, then, enhance classroom into a model of world: should transform its abstract freedom into a concrete autonomy of speculation and criticism. But the testimony of teachers tells that this enhancement rarely occurs, that classroom in its own social particularity remains resistant, intransigent. Why this should be so is hardly baffling. Donald Marshall refers to typical displays of "deficiency in thinking" that reflect "previous education and mental lives." As he suggests, the classroom represents not simply an engagement between lesser and greater knowledge, but between cultural outlooks in many cases hardly cognizant of each other except as antagonists. As a form classroom always implies difference between instructor and class, a difference that initiates discourse. But the difference that stands as barrier—either of misunderstanding, or (in the instance Trilling represents) too facile understanding—more com-

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monly exemplifies the predicament of the place, and the folklore of literary teaching. It is often a place of mutual, and thus incomplete and unresolved, acculturation. Discrepancy seems typical between institutional definition and student expectation on one hand, and a teacher's perception of his own necessities. "He must use whatever authority he may possess to say whether or not a work is true; and if not, why not; and if so, why so. He can do so only at considerable cost to his privacy." Add to this inner demand an eroding public sense of the authority of literature, of criticism—as Eugene Goodheart has argued recently—and a mutually frustrating predicament replaces the inaugurating difference of the ideal classroom. Classroom, even in the higher learning, often resembles a battlefield of blind struggle sublimated in a decorum of lectures, examinations, final grades.

There seems no clear route out of this impasse—surely curricular reform has abundantly manifest its own exasperating futility. But it seems commonplace that any talking about literature in the classroom that takes itself seriously should confront two features of its own enterprise; one, it should knowingly include in its critical theory at least a descriptive sociology of its own occasion, its own place within the institutional structures of the higher learning; and two, it should consider the social character of its own ends. We resist, and must, and must even more forcefully than we have, any instrumental view of literature, of the cultural tradition in general. But if we resist only on behalf of honorific values of pure contemplation, then we have already surrendered the field of culture to those forces that properly worry Donald Marshall; of consumerism. Talking about literature is at least talking about discourse antithetical to the normal, everyday environment of students and of teachers. Can such classroom talk translate into alternative, adversary public discourse? Not easily, nor without mediations that have yet to be invented. But we might keep before us the translation of Arnold's vision of the potency of criticism by the American literary radical, Randolph Bourne, who in an essay in 1915 on "Medievalism in Our Colleges" wrote: "The turning of these cultural studies into power is to be the exact measure of our growing conviction that ideas and knowledge about social relations and human institutions are to count as urgently in our struggle with the future as any mathematical or mechanical formulas did in the development of our present." Can we think about talking about literature in the classroom, finally, without at once thinking about the various social futures that await our acquiescence or our making?

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Roger Shattuck

Since I concur in great part with what Donald Marshall writes in his essay on the teaching of literature, I shall begin by reaffirming his most telling ideas in the form of a summary.

The New Criticism of the forties and fifties grew out of a desire to find a literary pedagogy that would allow teacher and students to discuss a work with sustained attention to "the text itself." According to Donald Marshall, this striving toward some "public objectivity of meaning" has been fragmented by two new critical schools. Reader-response theory, at least in its subjective-empiricist version, treats literature as a kind of fodder to be assimilated and processed by the reader's ego into his "identity theme." This quasi-therapeutic function displaces objective study; discussion may lead to a form of low-grade consensus, but that consensus does not take precedence over the "seeming certitude of private experience." Deconstruction, the other approach Donald Marshall criticizes, dissolves the text into an open or undetermined verbal free-for-all whose contradictions cannot be construed in order to yield a firm meaning or a consistent authorial self. In several understated and often ironic passages, Donald Marshall expresses his belief that both approaches undermine the proper teaching of literature. The first appeals ultimately to subjective and inaccessible processes; the second capitulates to an exaggerated sense of the slipperiness of language and of self.

In the face of these two attacks on any shared or potentially objective meaning, Donald Marshall affirms four desiderata in both teacher and student: an "evidentiary cast of mind" respecting facts enough to discriminate carefully among them; cultivation of the memory as a form of intelligence and as an extension of the self; "committed thinking" capable of using rational argument and evidence both to reach and to defend an intellectual position; and the increased use of writing as a means of studying literature.

Donald Marshall then devotes several pages to the doubts and conflicts that have affected his teaching since the early seventies, and to a picture of the profession today as uncertain and in disarray. Only general education and the teaching of writing seem to hold firm while the study of literature comes under attack from within and from without.

The final pages describe another set of desiderata in the teacher of literature. He should be willing to identify himself with "larger

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interests" such as truth, basic political rights, and the health of institutions. He should temper his commitments with a William Jamesian pluralism that will mediate between totality and fragmentation, between the authoritarian and the skeptical. And he should develop a sense of the creative merging of cultures as an essential element in our own American culture.

I am pleased to find that Donald Marshall expresses strong convictions in temperate, common-sense language and that he remains unconverted to recent critical methods insofar as they aspire to modify the teaching of literature. In my opinion he could have pushed his first four desiderata even harder and given himself space, for example, to discriminate among different kinds of memory as Bergson and Proust did, and to explain the specific benefits of writing stories as an approach to reading fiction.

The principal weakness of the paper belongs to the occasion. This is a conference on criticism, and Donald Marshall understandably felt obliged to talk about it. But the firmly argued first half of his paper on two critical approaches remains detachable from the second half devoted to the announcement of his own convictions about teaching. Reader-response theory and decomposition (to which he should probably have added speech-act theory) play the role of straw men and then disappear. They do not even return, as one would expect, as an element in the discouraging portrait of the profession near the end. By referring back to them Donald Marshall could have brought out that the problems we face are intellectual as much as they are economic. For the more we dismiss story, character, and unity from literature, the more we will lose our constituency. The last sentence of this section, "What would be lost in that scheme is history," dangles in front of us an argument that is never fleshed out.

Because he glances off them at several points, I feel justified in bringing up two omissions in Donald Marshall's discussion of teaching literature. Reader-response theory, he argues, subordinates literature to the wayward demands of our own enclosed self. Decomposition takes literature as a demonstration of the hypnotic illusion or vacancy of self. By examining these two variants of narcissism Donald Marshall has opened the way toward the opposite view of reading. Yet he never brings himself to affirm that the fundamental power and appeal of literature consists, not in its confinement to one self-absorbed ego, but in its power to convey a sense of *otherness*, to let us enter another person's thought, to allow us to get out of our own skin. Thus, even more powerfully than memory, literature can serve as an extension of

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self, and does not inevitably reinforce the ego's old refrain (reader-response) or undermine its very existence (decomposition). I believe, and believe I could demonstrate, that nonartistic experiences do not provide this release from the confines of self with an intensity comparable to that afforded by works of art and literature.

The most troubling and potentially controversial issue raised by the teaching of literature lurks constantly in the background of Donald Marshall's essay and never comes out into the open. All parties to the activity—students, teachers, parents, society in general—tacitly assume that the reading of literary masterpieces will contribute to the formation of character. We even take for granted that the curious professional rituals of earning a teaching certificate or a Ph.D. in literature—rituals that include no examination of a candidate's personal life, no rigorous physical or moral discipline, no period of vigil and prayer, no systematic self-appraisal or self-analysis—qualify a set of certified persons to speak with authority in the classroom about character and moral choices in works of literature. And what students hear about the moral stature of Hamlet or Faust or Tom Sawyer presumably makes a difference to their lives.

At the same time we literary types—critics and teachers—have helped to establish a complementary principle that has now survived most legal tests: namely, that the forms of pornography do not incite to crime, are not demonstrably pernicious for adults, and have a right to be published and sold. However, if we believe that pornography does not corrupt, how far can we consistently argue that the humanities humanize? How real is the dilemma?

A discussion of teaching literature in the eighties, or at any time, cries out for an examination of how the surrogate domain of literature permits a form of moral exploration or experiment within the life of the imagination, and then directs that fragile process back to our own existence. Sensitivity to persons and language, to place and time; the ability to suspend habits of thought in order to inspect and modify them; an awareness of the temptation to break conventions and continuities capriciously or willfully—all these items are at stake in the study of literature. Within the special experimental environment of the classroom, the interpretation of literary texts confronts us constantly with questions of character and morality. Eventually those discussions impinge on our behavior in facing the searing crises of being ourselves. All the formal and stylistic mastery of *Madame Bovary* or *Ulysses* does not remove them from this personal context.

Donald Marshall's paper argues cogently that good books need not

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be reduced to ego food or to self-defeating puzzles, and his down to earth recommendations about memory and commitment are welcome. I feel, however, that he leaves much to be said about the way much of recent criticism, by its scienticism or its penchant for pure theory, has fallen away from the responsibility to help us deal with questions of character and morality as they importune us in literary works.

NORMAN BIRNBAUM: We have a certain amount of time for discussion. Donald Marshall will respond later, when he can also respond to remarks from participants.

MORRIS DICKSTEIN: I'd like to speak to the point raised by Roger Shattuck at the end. By what process of certification does the teacher of literature set up shop to deal with questions of morals and the formation of character without periods of prayer and so on? Now it seems one could extend that to the question: By what process does the novelist or the poet or the playwright set up shop as the purveyor of morals, or character, or personality, or history, or anything else with even less certification than the critic of literature? I pose that question, and I also give my own answer and wait for your answer. But this seems to me related to the whole question of authority, which, of course, has been raised again and again by structuralists and deconstructionists who attack privileged positions in criticism. One reply to the question of the authority of the artist and the authority of the critic, or the authority of the teacher, is that the act itself has to be self-justified. Insofar as other people can acknowledge and justify the value in what he has done, to that extent he has created within himself, he has generated, his own authority. I don't see how any external form of certification, such as the doctor's degree in divinity, really gives one the power or the experience or the proper certification to deal with questions of faith and morals.

NORMAN BIRNBAUM: If I can intervene at this point, there is a striking resemblance or analogy with the teaching of the so-called social sciences, which as you know are actually the deformed or bastard offspring of moral philosophy. Very few social scientists, in whatever field—sociology, history, philosophy, politics, economics, psychology—would seriously argue in the grand tradition of Western social thought that they were teaching citizens, instructing citizens to make, as it were, autonomous self-liberating or self-developing political choices. At most they would argue that they

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were teaching a wise resignation before the inevitable, or openly avow that they were giving instruction for subjective usage, namely instruction in various techniques which would assist persons, students, in eventually integrating themselves in one or another social hierarchy. Curiously, it seems to me that Donald Marshall and Roger Shattuck, I think, pointed this out. On the one hand there is a plea for the general enlargement of our public cultural horizon with a plea for a self-critical approach on the part of our entire culture to its historical position. On the other hand there is an interesting notion, that the teaching of literature might well turn into cultural creativity of the individual by improving or encouraging writing—not in some vulgar sense of improving techniques of communication but as individual cultural exercises curiously disjoined from the larger movement of culture, just in the way that instruction in the social sciences, which sometimes improves the insight of individuals, is disjoined from any larger sense of political or moral purpose. So it would seem that some of these fields have, viewed in this way, curious and quite unexpected resemblances.

ROGER SHATTUCK: I would like to respond to what Morris Dickstein brought out. I don't think that we should set up a series of certification processes that would involve the examination of the personal life of the candidate. I was really trying to point out the curious situation in which we do have a system called the Ph.D. system, which we have accepted tacitly as qualifying people to talk about very, very delicate things to our own children. Yet that degree has many things in it which seem to be the opposite of what you would expect. For instance, it would normally be an expectation of anyone teaching literature that he should spend at least, let's say, five years away from the academic scene. But the Ph.D. may never have spent more than a few months away from school and spend the rest of his life there. I mean this is built in—a very wrong thing is part of the institution and vigil and prayer. I guess we cannot introduce that into our certification programs in literature, but I am trying to point out a kind of paradox. I agree that the teacher, like the author, the writer, must by his performance generate his own authority. And there is no agency which is finally going to be able to do this. But from time to time I think we simply ought to have a very hard look at some of the aspects of the training of our teachers, things that we make part of that institution.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: I think the talks were interesting in more than one way. Aside from the fact that I was generally agreeing with and

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sympathetic to the points made by the three speakers, I think an important but side issue was raised by all of them. It is the dilemma, the kind of pitfalls that you get into in the swing away from concentration on text. And regardless of how you approach the text—that is New Criticism, structuralist criticism—often the swing away from textual criticism and the teaching of texts in the school lands us on the opposite pole where we begin to cope with the problems of morality or politics in the classroom. I'm limiting myself to teaching now, not to criticism, which is precisely what textualists and structuralists have been trying to get away from. But this is another pitfall. It does not seem to me that those of us who teach English, teach literature—I'm going to make this statement schematic and strong—should be involved in the teaching of morality, the teaching of politics, the teaching of political attitudes.

In that sense I am going to answer Morris Dickstein's question in a different way. His question is how can we prepare ourselves, or what is the preparation for teaching moral issues in the classroom by English teachers. I would say no preparation. We are not moralists; we are not equipped to be moralists. And I might even go further and say that perhaps there's a danger here in assuming that the teaching of literature is somehow involved with the teaching of the proper political attitudes or the proper moral attitudes. In fact, Lionel Trilling's essay that Alan Trachtenberg quoted seems to me to point up the contradictions inherent in the whole teaching situation. Lionel Trilling as usual is quite ambivalent and ambiguous about them, and he is saying that we as teachers of English upholding the traditions of literature, scholarship, humanism, and humane values, are teaching modernist texts which are subversive of all these attitudes and values. In other words, remember his famous phrase, "modernism in the streets." We're caught in a contradiction. I would make an alternative suggestion, one that would take a lot of time to develop, and that is that we avoid certain difficulties if we say to ourselves that by teaching literature we're teaching students to think about literature; we're teaching them as much as we know, as much as we can explain, about the kind of mind that produces poems, short stories, critical essays, and all the genres of criticism. So that in a sense what they are learning is the essence of a discipline, the essence of a specific activity, a specific intellectual or imaginative enterprise.

Now one last point—I think we might touch at some point on one of the problems behind what we are talking about but which

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never seems to come to the surface, and that is the problem of mass education. Many of the problems arise because we are asked to teach things that we are not equipped to teach in a system of mass education, in large undergraduate courses, to students who come in not to learn literature as professionals understand it, but who come in for other reasons. And we are breaking our necks trying to adapt our professional knowledge and our professional experience to the different needs of a classroom. In a sense, the classroom creates different needs because of the condition of mass education. I'm really trying to open up a number of questions rather than quarrel with any one specific formulation.

DENIS DONOGHUE: I would just suggest one qualification of what William Phillips has just said. I don't think that it is a question of our being trained as moralists, because one of the fundamental facts, especially about modern literature, is that for at least one hundred years there has been a relation between literature and society. But that relation has been interrogative, critical, and perhaps indeed on the whole, subversive. Now critics tend temperamentally to be on the side of the high literature, perhaps most especially when its relation to society has been subversive. We could pick up on what Trilling said in his famous essay, but we could also supply less tendentious texts, such as a statement by Richard Blackmur that says the function of literature is to remind the powers that be, simple and corrupt as they are, of the forces they have to control. That seems to me a very intelligent, helpful statement. Put it beside an equally intelligent and helpful statement by Kenneth Burke who said, "The law of the imagination is: when in Rome do as the Greeks." Both of these provide us with a kind of program for teaching. It is a program which forces us into the position of being on the side of the high, subtle, sinuous values which Morris Dickstein invoked in relation to high literature, as against the sloppy, vulgar, obtuse values such as they are, which our corrupt society knows and endorses.

This raises a very particular problem in relation to teachers. That is, we may not have been specifically trained as critics of society any more than we have been trained as moralists or philosophers. But it is not open to us really to choose if we are concerned with high literature at all. It is not a matter of free choice, whether we engage in the interrogation which arises from literature, literature itself being interrogative in its chief character. Now it is in that sense—I am not suggesting for a moment that we should then be trained to negotiate the position of being social critics—that I am suggesting that we

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have been placed by modern literature itself in a position of interrogating society, interrogating morals, interrogating religions, interrogating myths. It is in that sense that I think we can bring together some of the considerations we have been talking about all day.

PETER BROOKS: William Phillips wanted me to talk because I find I'm in total agreement with him. I find what he says very right and very moving. I was interested by what Roger Shattuck said, but I was troubled by it. I think if we set ourselves up in the position of teaching character and morality, not only are we on spurious grounds, we are also playing into the hands of what the worst of our students want from us. They're all interested in questions of character and morality and want us to claim that literature is simply confirming their views on the subject. I find a great deal of education in the classroom becomes a matter of resistance to this, resistance to what students get out of texts at first reading, and an attempt to formalize it.

One of the more extreme cases came to me last year. When I was teaching in a summer program I had a student who, to be sure, came from the communications school, who wrote a paper in which he said Julian Sorel was not a hero but a villain and therefore is to be rejected, and along with him the whole of *The Red and the Black*. I think the discipline of the classroom is a discipline of formalization which takes us through the linguistic process and precisely through all that we can learn and exchange in a disciplined way about language. I think part of the answer to Lionel Trilling's famous question, too, is that the damned questions of Ivan Karamazov have immediate ethical reference. Nonetheless they are couched in language and they come within a fictional universe. It's in this process of mediation that we must learn to deal with them. And I am more and more convinced in a very literal sense that all I can teach in a classroom is reading. And I sense a very great continuity between my task and the task that starts in first grade. It simply is operating with overcoating rather than with the basic coat.

EUGENE GOODHEART: I would like to pursue the line that Peter Brooks is taking. I find that he has oddly abdicated his role as a teacher in response to the statement of a student that Julian Sorel is a villain. How do you respond to that statement simply by addressing the novel in a formalistic way? It seems to me the student is challenging you to make the opposite statement or another kind of statement, that he's a hero or that he's a certain kind of hero in which villainy is somehow an inappropriate or inadequate way of seeing him. So

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immediately it seems to me you're involved in a discussion of moral issues. That's not the same thing as teaching morality the way a preacher teaches morality. It seems to me that what has to be answered, that is if you want to take an absolutely moral view of the task of teaching, what has to be answered is Denis Donoghue's challenge that if literature is a form of interrogation of moral issues, among other themes, how do you teach literature and avoid that fact of literature? I would like that issue to be pursued in discussion.

ROGER SHATTUCK: May I add that at no point did I advocate the teaching of morality or character. I was quite careful in this to suggest that this is inevitably the result of the very texts we choose. We could teach texts, and I think that a great deal of modern criticism tries to homogenize literary works into objects that raise no moral issues, and I find that a great deal of structuralist criticism doesn't face these issues. I simply think a teacher, by necessity, faces both the demands of the students in front of him and the realities of the texts that they are reading together. And these force him to have to deal with questions of morality and character.

DONALD MARSHALL: Peter Brooks is saying: we've heard that the classroom is a battlefield but I'm not sure what kind of battlefield it is. It is sometimes a battlefield where the values and interests of the student are opposed to the values and interests of the teacher, but I'm not always sure it should be. If a student makes a demand on you that a discussion of *The Red and the Black* ought to lead to a consideration of moral and political issues, then in my view he's right. And if the teacher doesn't want to do that, why? Well, because modernist literature has taught him literature is not supposed to do that. It's supposed to be autonomous. I mean, he learned that from a critical theory. He brought a certain critical theory to bear. And I'm not sure that I finally believe in that critical theory. I can see it as a battlefield appealing from Philip drunk to Philip sober and saying to the student, "Yes, you want some discussion of the moral and political issues involved in *The Red and the Black*, but you want a good discussion of those, you don't want a simple-minded one, do you?" And it's hard for me to imagine my students saying to me "Yes! I want a simple-minded discussion."

So let me say just one more thing and that is that I agree with Denis Donoghue's remark that in the last hundred years or so literature has been chiefly a form of interrogation in the society and has been largely hostile. I just got through reading Roger Shattuck's book and one can see how interrogative it has been. It was not always

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so and it is with some shock that I think I realized and suggested that my students might also realize that, for instance, Aristotle took for granted that a work of literature, a tragedy, was founded on commonplaces which everybody understood. As for instance, to put it in simple terms, that if a man by accident should, without knowing what he had done, happen to kill his father and marry his mother, and if it should then turn out that he discovers what he had done, he would be unhappy. That's a kind of banal commonplace, but Aristotle took it for granted that if you didn't know it, you weren't going to be able to understand the work of literature. I don't know why we should not in the classroom also, even in teaching modern literature, interrogate the assumption that the stance of modern literature is necessarily hostile to society. Why should it be? Should it be?

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: I'd like to make clear in advance that I thought the papers delivered to the session were quite brilliant in their organization and their force. I think what we're differing about might be easily resolved. Obviously Denis Donoghue, for example, is right. He's agreeing with Lionel Trilling, who says the force of modern literature is corrosive and subversive and often perverse. Incidentally, I'm not being a devil's advocate because I'm one of the people criticized in that essay by Lionel Trilling for the position I took in defense of modern literature. I think the issue is this: you cannot teach modern literature or nineteenth-century literature without teaching all the various forces that went into the making of any given work—the political and moral forces that went into, let's say, *The Red and the Black,* into Dostoevsky's famous Grand Inquisitor. You can't avoid that. The question is not whether you go into it or not, but whether you take a position on it. That is what we seem to be arguing about and I think that's what Peter Brooks meant. That's where I think I would agree with him that, for example, when Dostoevsky raises the question of whether it's worth taking the life of a single child to improve the future society, we are not called upon as teachers to tell the students it is or it isn't worthwhile to take the life of a child. That's not what we're there for. What we're there for is to explain why Dostoevsky, one, raised this question, and two, how that question was incorporated into the texture of his work.

NORMAN BIRNBAUM: Would you go a bit further and argue that teachers are also there to point out that this is probably an unavoidable question given the nature of reality and that they had better learn to think about it in one or another way.

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WILLIAM PHILLIPS: Yes, of course.

DONALD MARSHALL: I don't think that I disagree very much with William Phillips except with what he just said. I think a teacher should answer that question. In the first place I don't think you should overestimate your influence on your students. Just because you give an answer to that question doesn't mean your student is going to agree with you. I mean, you're not God; you're just a teacher. In the second place, what you are exhibiting is not the bottom line answer. You are exhibiting thought about the question and a thought which reaches an answer on certain grounds. What I'm arguing is that thinking is the very form of morality. You're not teaching a moral doctrine; you're teaching thinking, and thinking about moral questions (at least I thought that was what Hannah Arendt was trying to argue). I think you will invite your students similarly to reach their own view about that question, but at some point in a classroom I think somebody has got to turn to somebody and say, "All right, I get it that Dostoevsky raises this question. What do you think? What do you think now that you've read Dostoevsky?" I don't think you get to shirk that question.

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BOOKS

RUNNING ON EMPTY

ESCAPE ATTEMPTS: THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF RESISTANCE TO EVERYDAY LIFE. By Stanley Cohen and Laurie Taylor. Pelican. $2.95.

THE SERIAL: A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF MARIN COUNTY. By Cyra McFadden. Alfred A. Knopf. $4.95.

If I were asked to name some representative books of the seventies, these two would surely make the list. They are wry and worldly; they slip down easily; their tone hovers between cynicism and resignation, with an occasional dash of nostalgia. If you compare them with the cult books of the sixties—say R.D. Laing's *The Politics of Experience* and Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*—how much more sensible and nuanced they look; but also, how constricted in their sense of life's possibilities! Do the real adventures of our time now take place in the kitchen, at the vet, or down at the singles bar? Have our concerns really dwindled, as *Escape Attempts* suggests, down to that most mundane and intractable of human projects: "how to get through the day"?

Cohen and Taylor themselves are recent converts to the belief that everyday life should be the central concern of social theory. As trendy young sociologists in the sixties they were fascinated by those at the ragged edge of modern society—Mods, Rockers, vandals, jailbirds, and the like. But now they admit to having romanticized and exaggerated the alienation of these hard cases; on the other hand, they have come to feel that it takes only a slight shift in focus to see *everyone* as a deviant, always longing to remake the world closer to his heart's desire. Society is always throbbing with subversive energies, they now argue, and the real problem is to explain why these energies nonetheless leave what they call "paramount reality" substantially intact. *Escape Attempts* seeks an answer to this paradox within our banal routines of domesticity, work, and recreation, and our equally banal attempts to break free.

Such routine activities can be experienced in three ways, say Cohen and Taylor. The first is simple acceptance or "unreflective accommodation." Marcuse and others of the "false consciousness" school have claimed that indoctrination by the mass media has reduced

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most workers in modern states to just such a condition of resigned torpor. But *Escape Attempts* argues that unreflective accommodation plays a minor role in daily consciousness, reserved for such basic tasks as personal hygiene. For it is of the very essence of modern society that each member of it is constantly reminded that her particular role is contingent, that she could in theory have a different and perhaps better job, house, car, or mate. Our predominant attitude is therefore "self-awareness," whereby we simultaneously affirm our social identities and call them into question. "Throughout the land," note Cohen and Taylor, "previously disenchanted individuals are busily assuring others that they are more than they do; 'I'm not really a university lecturer,' they confide 'not like the others are . . . I see the whole thing as rather an elaborate game.'" So we protect our fragile core of self-hood. In sturdier moments we may risk a move to the third level, "self-conscious reinvestment": the feeling that, in an oversophisticated world, mindlessly conventional behavior may achieve the closest thing to spontaneity. "I find the whole situation absurd," their exemplary guest proclaims to the party's hostess, "no one seems to realize the silliness, the grotesque artificiality of their behaviour." "Ah," said the hostess, "you must join the sociologists in the far corner. The rest of us realized all that long ago but decided to ignore it and enjoy the party."

There must be more to life, however, than mere routine and "the nightmare of repetition." Doesn't everyone have surplus energy to spend on "Free Areas, Escape Routes and Identity Sites"? Isn't there, in modern society, a rich choice of ways to "get away from it all"? Not really, Cohen and Taylor argue; for human conduct, in order to count as such, must inexorably be governed by a *script*: an implicit scenario that defines our acts and makes them intelligible to fellow members of our culture. Like the Saussurean *langue*, scripts constitute a radically impersonal and formal system, and no conceivable script can be "outside of society." We may choose the script that suits our fancy—playboy, marginal Jewish intellectual, liberated woman, etc.—but their conventionality attaches them seamlessly to the realm of paramount reality. Emma Bovary is driven towards suicide by her discovery, in adultery, of "all the clichés of marriage"; she might have survived, though, if she had seen that up till then she had been acting out all the clichés of adultery.

The desire for spontaneity conflicts most painfully with the hegemony of scripts in sexual life, where Freud and the romantics have encouraged us to experience sex as an invasion by vital, instinctual forces that sweep aside the social self. Here *Escape Attempts* leans on

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the theories of John Gagnon and William Simon, who argue that sexual conduct is regulated by learned conventional scripts, just like any other social activity. "There is no natural man," they claim, "struggling against the pressures of civilization." Or, what amounts to the same thing, we posit various types of "natural man" to rationalize our always already socialized intentions. Far from being an escape from culture, sex is a crucial arena for that most civilized of tasks, sardonically named by Cohen and Taylor "the doing of identity work."

I should not leave the impression that *Escape Attempts* is a gloomily defeatist work; for all their cynicism, the authors winningly admit that they themselves have been among the most bumbling and persistent of escape artists:

> A visit to either one of our respective homes at the moment would reveal a museum of half-abandoned relics from these escape routes and free areas. Here there is a health-food diet book and a half-empty muesli packet left over from the days when rejuvenation through food was eagerly tried. In the desk drawer are fragments of the unfinished novel which meant emancipation from the drudgery of academic life. . . . Alongside the packets of Rizlas and torn cardboard on the living-room shelf are old boxes of incense sticks to remind us that tonight's taken-for-granted joint was only a few years ago seen as the doorway to new perception. . . . And in the cupboard under the stairs lie discarded travel brochures, half-constructed model airplanes, wrinkled dahlia tubers, unfinished water-colours, vegetarian recipe books, the remains of three hand-made candles, a smelly beer-stained polythene bucket, and a nasty pile of fetid mushroom culture.

Nor need every escape attempt end so dingily. Most of us have known "Momentary Slips through the Fabric"—glimpses of a transfigured, blissful world. And even if we dare not imitate them, we have before us the great exemplary figures who have gone permanently "Over the Wall" into madness, obsession, mysticism, or utopian politics.

Still, one might dismiss *Escape Attempts* as a witty trivialization of personal and social unhappiness, typical of the pusillanimous seventies; one might also see it as a symptom of England's special malaise, caused by the failure of its national escape attempt into imperial adventure. Cohen and Taylor themselves speculate that this may be so, that in the wider horizons of America or prerevolutionary Russia, man's destiny might be less exclusively a social one. *The Serial,* however, casts a cold eye on the classic American dream of escape by moving westward. It first appeared weekly in the Marin County *Pacific*

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Sun, chronicling the marital traumas of Harvey and Kate Holroyd as they ferociously pursue the good life in suburban San Francisco. Part of that pursuit is their typically Californian ambition to move, literally, up the hill—which, much to their chagrin, they have failed to do: "Harvey made a lot more money now than he had then, but they spent it rapidly on things they hadn't known existed ten years ago: Rossignol Stratos and season lift tickets at Squaw; twin Motobecane ten-speeds; Kate's Cuisinart, which did *everything* but put the pâté in the oven; Klip speakers and the top-of-the-line Pioneer receiver. . . ." And so on, as the eternal brand-name draws them upwards. But life in Marin is not just materialism run wild; there is also the search for inner satisfaction, memorably summed up in the career of Rita, a high school friend of Kate's from Spokane:

> Deeply involved in the human-potential movement, she had like *mutated* over the years through Gurdjieff, Silva Mind Control, actualism, analytical tracking, parapsychology, Human Life Styling, postural integration, the Fischer-Hoffman Process, hatha and raja yoga, integral massage, orgonomy, palmistry, Neo-Reichian bodywork and Feldenkrais functional integration. Currently she was commuting to Berkeley twice a week for "polarity balancing manipulation," which, she reported through her annual mimeographed Christmas letter, produces "good thinking."

McFadden's compendium of the follies of Marin escape artists is irresistibly funny and sharp eyed; still, her satire has a traditionalist bias that itself deserves a critical look. Her book ridicules every conceivable West Coast cliché of the past decade, from "I hear you" to "Life is part of existence." This language, now made notorious as "Psycho-babble," appears in *The Serial* in an undiluted form that practically no one in California actually speaks. Most people, self-consciously ironic, play off its clichés against more standard diction; in any case, it has long been California's role to endlessly throw up and combine new fashions in popular culture, including linguistic ones.

McFadden also takes a conservative line in her sympathy for Harvey's campaign against Marin trendiness, especially the feminist version thereof. His preference for Cutty Sark and Monday night football over hash and sensitivity groups makes him an individualist of a sort, though one who knows he must pay lip service to the received pieties of his milieu:

> Harvey believed in equal pay for equal work; he did his share of the chores for his and Kate's dinner parties by choosing the wine and

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> reminding her to make ice; he hired Ms. Murphy, even though she typed thirty words a minute and spelled "Fargo" with an *e* on the end, because any woman with thighs like hers deserved a chance to make it.

Harvey, a one-eyed man in the kingdom of the blind, becomes the book's hero, even though he humiliates Kate at every turn in her struggle to reconstruct their marriage. The feminist rhetoric of Kate and her "support group" echoes hollowly, for the bleak truth is that a set of fortyish housewives can't really stand up to husbands who hold all the high cards of money, social power, and sexual attractiveness. The book reduces modern feminism to just another attempt by American women to keep their errant mates in line by claiming moral superiority for the female sex. Thus blackmailed, the men resort to hypocrisy; but the women lie to themselves as well as to the world.

The Serial falls back, finally, on a wry stoicism: life is unfair and imperfect, so our best aids to survival are irony, a sense of proportion, and the time-tested anodynes—when Kate exhorts Harvey to cut out alcohol because "it gets between you and reality," he replies, with a sigh, "I know." Cohen and Taylor are more sophisticated, but their analysis is similarly dependent on the idea that "paramount reality" always has the last laugh. The term itself they borrow from Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, who state in *The Social Construction of Reality* that "the reality of everyday life" occupies, epistemologically, a "privileged position . . . impossible to ignore, difficult even to weaken in its imperative presence." Such a claim is doctrinaire and fuzzy at the same time: neither "paramount reality" nor "escape" can be taken to denote some fixed referent, because each derives its meaning from its relation of binary opposition to the other, and this relation will depend on particular, shifting circumstances. Cohen and Taylor themselves demonstrate how "self-conscious reinvestment" may transform paramount reality into an escape route: a classic example would be T.E. Lawrence's anonymous enlistment in the R.A.F. Once one admits that different people have different ways of constituting paramount reality, it ceases to be paramount in the sense of a stable and dominant structure of social meanings.

What is finally at issue is the nature of the "self" in modern society. Cyra McFadden's suburbanites possess only the illusion of individuality since they can want nothing spontaneously, but only because fashion tells them they *should* want it. Cohen and Taylor conclude with an even more sweepingly deterministic view:

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> The search for identity which we have described is an impulse to deny time, to ignore the sweep of history. It must be limited as an ideology because the facticity of the external world cannot be denied. We are not just born into some free floating balloon of identity—but into a specific time and place. To base a resistance plan against everyday life on the individual self must fail because of the ways that self is located in time and history and rooted to specific sets of social relationships.

To refuse to accept those roots, they continue, is a classic symptom of "bourgeois individualism" and its cult "of the unique individual identity, a self-consciousness which our society has developed almost to the point of the pathological." They then confess that they too are irrevocably and unabashedly infected with this same social disease: "We would prefer to see the self as a construct which only becomes alive by being wary, elusive, mobile, keeping some distance from social reality. 'I escape, therefore I am,' is ultimately the only ontological message we can manage."

Does the self stand alone, then, or is it an appendage of the external world? So long as Cohen and Taylor pose the issue in such terms they will remain trapped in bourgeois individualism regardless of the outcome, since in either case the question is how to define the boundaries of a substantial entity called "the self." To evade this dilemma, one must shift to a perspective like Julia Kristeva's, wherein the "self" is not half of an opposition, but a relationship between primordial subjectivity, on one side, and on the other all social and impersonal structures (especially that of language). This relationship must be mutually determined, since subject cannot be thought outside of structure and vice versa. When such a perspective is extended to society as a whole, "paramount reality" is no longer seen as a mere dead weight of facticity, but rather as a *resultant* of ongoing human interests and struggles. In Nietzsche's words, "It is our needs that interpret the world; our drives and their For and Against. Every drive is a kind of lust to rule; each one has its perspective that it would like to compel all the other drives to accept as a norm." There will always be a paramount reality, and we ignore it at our peril; but it is local and changeable, not monolithic. Through our "escape attempts" we try out our world-creating powers, and also discover their limits. These limits, however, are not eternal verities, but humanly constituted and contested; their nature is revealed in Engels's famous comment on the historical process: "what each individual wills is obstructed by every-

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one else, and what emerges is something that no one willed." Of course, to pose the problem in this way would spoil our authors' jokes; and it must be conceded that we need all the jokes we can muster, to get us through our days.

PAUL DELANY

THE CULTURE OF BROWS

DEMOCRACY AND THE NOVEL: POPULAR RESISTANCE TO CLASSIC AMERICAN WRITERS. By Henry Nash Smith. Oxford University Press. $13.95.

Democracy and the Novel argues that our classical writers had to battle against the demos in the form of "middlebrow" reviewers. Smith develops this theme, reminiscent of the 1950s obsession with the problem of mass culture, not by a detailed examination of reviewers' opinions but rather through Santayana's generalizations about the genteel tradition: "the secular faith or ideology lying at the base of American popular culture, a faith that 'the world . . . was a safe place, watched over by a kindly God, who exacted nothing but cheerfulness and good will from his children; and the American flag was a sort of rainbow in the sky, promising that all storms were over.'" The philosopher was talking about traditional belief in New England, as held by "American highbrows" at the end of the nineteenth century, "that the universe exists and is governed for the sake of man or the human spirit." For Henry Nash Smith, however, the ideology more often denotes the demand of "middlebrow" reviewers that literature should be inspiring and reassuring. The only democratic aspect of this story that I can see is his connecting this demand to the need for allaying anxieties aroused by rapid upward social mobility.

Seeking to build a historical bridge over the chasm left between the eras before and after the Civil War by most accounts of American literature, Smith shows how Hawthorne and Melville shared with

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Howells, Twain, and James a struggle with the genteel expectations of popular reviewers, while each in his own way prepared the ground for a growth of modernist literary sensibility. In this perspective he sees Hawthorne projecting an "ontologically ambiguous fictive world" and foreshadowing Flaubert, James, and the existentialists, while Melville treats madness in Ahab with a "strong appeal for readers affected by the post-Modernist cult of absurdity that has gained momentum since the Second World War." Similarly, though the essays on Henry Ward Beecher's *Norwood* and William Dean Howells's *A Modern Instance* show them to be trapped by the "middlebrow mold," those on Mark Twain and Henry James show by contrast how they transmitted to twentieth-century novelists "what the next generation could use of the achievements of their predecessors in the nineteenth century." Smith's story is thus ruled by an implicit idea of aesthetic progress, defined as emancipation from what Santayana called the "genteel tradition" and movement towards the assumptions of modern writers.

A major hazard in this literary version of the Whig interpretation of history—reshaping the past in search of one's spiritual ancestors—is the danger of making the past subservient to an uncriticized present, a mere contributor to our presumed superiority. Smith is on guard against this distortion, rightly warning us that Hawthorne "did not intend anything so extreme" as an "absurd universe like that of the existentialists," and that Melville's Ahab is closer to Shakespeare's tragic heroes than to the "programmatic meaninglessness of the world of the Keseys and Hellers and Pynchons." Smith knows that while Twain's later solipsism may sound like "a prophecy of the fictive world of Samuel Beckett or Thomas Pynchon," even his best work contains "significant vestiges" of the outworn system of "middlebrow" values. While Henry James's assertion that "It is art that makes life" is "consonant with Robbe-Grillet's contention that the style of the novel '*constitutes* reality,'" still, James was shocked by the war of 1914 into an awareness that he too, in a way not wholly different from Howells, believed in "civilization, in progress, in a moral order in the universe" at a time when the writers of the next generation were finding Western civilization to be a Waste Land. Smith's historical sensitivity thus prevents his story from becoming a simple polar conflict between pioneering artists and philistine reviewers.

Even so, the idea of literary progress exacts the price of elevating Robbe-Grillet over George Eliot on the ground that the idea of art representing life is outmoded by the idea of art making life. Smith

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points to the "highbrow notion" of the "autonomous artist, dependent exclusively on his own sensibility" as a contemporary verity. It underwrites the voracious imagination of contemporary novelists rather than what George Eliot called the "veracious imagination" of the historically minded realism of the nineteenth century. Smith tends to take too much for granted, the familiar contrast between the fabulistic American "romance" and the socially oriented English novel, a simplification derived from Tocqueville to which W.H. Auden, Lionel Trilling, Richard Chase, and Quentin Anderson have all contributed. Thus Smith faults Hawthorne's reviewers for failing to see a "truth of romance distinct from the mere imitation of outer reality." Certainly Hawthorne did explore the "dark underside of the psyche" in stories that do not literally imitate reality; nevertheless, they often also function as a profound moral commentary on the history of New England, which he had absorbed by dint of much familiarity with historical sources. Smith's version of Hawthorne as psychological romancer of ontological ambiguity ignores what Trilling emphasized in his second thoughts about Hawthorne: "he always consented to the power of his imagination being controlled by the power of the world." In this respect if he was "one of the spirits of yesterday," rather than of today, he might also be an artist for "the day after tomorrow."

Ralph Ellison saw the basic point about our early literature when he said that *Invisible Man* reached back to "that broad conception of democracy which vitalized the work of our greatest writers." His novel is truly Hawthornian not only because of its symbolic and surreal methods, combined with psychological sophistication, but also because it is profoundly historical in its subject and theme. The much overdone distinction between the American romance and the English novel has obscured this kind of continuity between our classic and modern writers, and its story remains to be told. *Democracy and the Novel* establishes continuity in different terms by its emphasis on the culture of "brows," rather than on the culture of politics.

Smith himself, however, notes that it is "far from clear" how "brow levels" are related to social and economic classes. Given this uncertainty, the whole question of the relation between democracy and the novelists' collision with reviewers is obscure. For Santayana the genteel tradition was an outworn, feminized, and diluted mixture of evangelical Christianity and transcendentalism among clergymen and professors, who were no longer animated by the agonized conscience of an Edwards or the radical subjectivism of an Emerson. Ann Douglas in *The Feminization of American Culture* has extensively documented

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Santayana's observation. Smith's essays overlap her book in emphasizing the antiintellectualism of the reviewers, but this theme does not fit Mark Twain's escape from "the control of the dominant popular culture" by his recourse to a vernacular, folk tradition, suspicious of the "high-sounding abstract terms" of the "decadent high culture of the nineteenth century." In this respect it is Mark Twain, not the genteel reviewers, who looks democratic, and Smith can assimilate him to the book's theme only by seeing his "lowbrow audience" as a folk element in a society where "middlebrows" represent the majority. Smith's strategy reduces the democratic element to a stylistic search for "traces of infection" from a "dominant popular culture" paradoxically identified with a "decadent high culture." Detached from a political system, the term "democracy" becomes too much like Humpty Dumpty's "impenetrability," which he always paid extra for doing so much work.

One wonders what Santayana would have made of seeing the skeptical "perspectivism" of modernity opposed to his concept of the genteel tradition. As a realist with Catholic sympathies, he dealt wryly with the notion of experience as the "only real existence, the ultimate object that all thought and theory must regard." For him this position reflected the atmosphere of German idealism, which America did not need to adopt because "something very like it had grown up spontaneously in New England in the form of transcendentalism and unitarian theology." In his 1911 address on the genteel tradition, delivered at the University of California where Smith is professor emeritus, Santayana hoped that the giant redwoods of the state would nurture instead a naturalistic sensibility to rebuke all egocentricity, all humanisms. Modernist perspectivism, while no longer genteel, would still be on his terms an imperialistic consciousness, only another example of the serpent swallowing its tail. He admired that side of William James which expressed a medically trained empiricism, capable of accusing philosophers of having constructed a fictitious entity of "consciousness" out of the reality of "breath moving outwards, between the glottis and the nostrils." In Santayana's view, materialists by instinct, private gentlemen like himself, "whom the clergy and the professors cannot deceive," best escaped the genteel tradition.

Smith wants to go beyond F.O. Matthiessen's conception of "what is meant by a writer's concern with democracy," the ideas and attitudes expressed in his work, by taking into account the relation between masterpieces and "non-literary aspects of the culture." The intention is

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admirable, but reducing that conception to the writer's conflict with "middlebrow" prejudices in popular reviewers is only to continue the confinement of analysis to literary culture, while also diminishing the role of political ideas.

CUSHING STROUT

WRITING CUBAN HISTORY

VIEW OF DAWN IN THE TROPICS. By Guillermo Cabrera Infante. Translated by Suzanne Jill Levine. Harper & Row. $8.95.

Not all collections of tales make a book. Most of the time, each piece refuses to harmonize with the others, functions only within its own limits, seems pushed into uncomfortable proximity with its neighbors. Generally, the only justification of that type of book, if any, is the implicit or explicit reference to an external unity (author, subject, style). This is not the case with *View of Dawn in the Tropics.* And yet, the book took strange paths before it was put together.

The same title belonged first to a novel which won the 1964 Biblioteca Breve prize in Spain (previously given to Mario Vargas Llosa's first novel, *The Time of the Hero*). But it was then a totally different book which followed certain fictional characters, united by a common pursuit of the excitement of night life, while, at the same time, it presented in short, powerful vignettes, another cast of characters: those set to change Cuban society by means of a violent revolution. The title suggested at least one thing: a panoramic view of a privileged moment of Cuban reality (or history). In the tropical dawn, it was possible to recognize the dawn of a different history.

In the three years which lapsed between the prize and the actual publication of the novel, Cabrera Infante rewrote it. Basically, he added a few chapters here and there, but his major piece of surgery was the excision of all the vignettes. The historical dimension added to the

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narrative by those characters who (to use ready-made phrases) "belong to History" or "will be absolved by her" was thus obliterated. The novel become more novelistic. Published under the Spanish title of *Tres tristes tigres* (*Three Trapped Tigers* in the English translation), it was immediately recognized as one of the most relevant texts of the new Latin American novel. There has been much speculation over the motives the author might have had in eliminating the vignettes from the 1967 novel. In an interview in 1968, he said that it was because he now disagreed with their original political intention. He saw them as the product of a historically determined situation: the moment in which, with the revolution in power, Cuban writers felt it necessary to write *about* the revolution, *for* the revolution. These reasons of political opportunity, noted Cabrera Infante, no longer existed in 1967. *Three Trapped Tigers* was thus a different book: eliminating the vignettes not only reduced considerably the text but also shifted its axis. Formerly, fiction and reality merged to create a further fictional dimension. In the original book, the text of the fiction and the historical context were engaged in a constant dialogue. The obsessive comings and goings of Silvestre and his friends in Havana by night, were contrasted with the vignettes' tragic confrontations; the purely verbal passion of those young tigers was sharply outlined against the violent death, tortures, and betrayals of a permanent revolutionary fight. While the vignettes were nothing but historical, *Three Trapped Tigers* recognized no other reality than its own fiction.

Some readers had assumed that by excluding the vignettes from the novel to which they had belonged, Cabrera Infante had condemned them to death. The day he decided to publish them separately and as an independent unity, a third book came into being. While editing them out of *Three Trapped Tigers* and reediting them for the new book, Cabrera Infante subjected the vignettes to a process known in film language as montage.

In the original 1964 book, the vignettes also reconstructed passages of Cuban history or legend, but they were not chronologically displayed. They were inserted throughout the long text of the novel in deliberate disorder. Furthermore, since neither the characters nor the historical moment they evoked were ever clearly identified, it was possible to telescope episodes from the revolutionary struggle against Spain with episodes in the fight against Batista. In the synchronic context of the original work (a few days and nights in 1958 Havana), the vignettes referred to a single struggle.

When he put *View of Dawn in the Tropics* together for this (third)

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version, Cabrera Infante decided to do away with the chronological ambiguity. He placed the vignettes in an order corresponding to that of History, and more specifically, to *a* certain view of History. The vignettes, in this light, acquired a documentary value they lacked in the original work. (The original view was synchronic: everything took place in the same space and in the same time.) In this third version, diachrony seems to dominate everything. The book now opens with a spatial vision of the island (it will close with the same view) which provides an introduction to the rigorously chronological sequence of Cuban history, from the arrival of Columbus in 1492 to the imprisonment and death of Pedro Luis Boitel, the student revolutionary leader accused of conspiring against the state, in 1960.

Though each vignette functions as a historical illustration (it is sometimes the description of an engraving or a photograph, even the narration of an anecdote or a real event), there is not for the most part any precise identification of either the date or the characters. Boitel is one of the few to be named. Many can be identified only by certain details in the narration. Thus, for example, any Latin American reader will recognize the "nearly bald little man with the big moustache" as Jose Marti, whose death at Dos Rios is encapsuled in a powerful vignette. Also recognizable is the portrait of Camilo Cienfuegos, one of the guerrilla leaders who defeated Batista and who is evoked here by a description of a photograph in which only the photographer is named. Cuban readers will undoubtedly identify many other heroes and episodes. Already in the second vignette, the author includes a quote from Fernando Portuondo, the author of a *History of Cuba* which has been used as a high school textbook for several decades. Cabrera Infante alludes to this work in many of the vignettes, quoting from it and making use of its historical episodes, illustrations, and photographs. In fact, this *History of Cuba* is one of the texts which make the intertext of *View of Dawn in the Tropics*.

But the larger text in the background of these vignettes is History. The vignettes are miniatures, very sharp and very concrete, of moments in History (or Legend, but also woven into the script of History). These moments are evoked in their reality, or historical concreteness. By excluding names and dates, and only preserving the chronological sequence, the book reduces one of the fundamental elements of History to nothing. What is preserved is still History, but it is lacking in what makes History a permanent script—that is, a script that attempts to fix forever, and in a durable rhetoric formula, what *actually* happened. The intent of these vignettes is more modest. Instead of History, with a

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capital, they are concerned with history. Or more accurately, with the writing of history.

There is another text, besides Fernando Portuondo's, to be read between the lines of *View of Dawn in the Tropics.* It is Borges's *A Universal History of Infamy*, published for the first time in 1935. In that book, Borges applied to history a parodic reduction, exaggerating the importance of trivial events, seeking out its characters not among the heroes but among the supporting players of history, recording not fame but infamy. For him, the rhetorical exercise implicit in his parodies was a means of disguising a larger intent: to invest with historical or documentary "reality" the unreality of his characters, many of them actual people but seen from a fictitious perspective (as, for example, the Implausible Imposter, Tom Castro) or almost entirely fictitious (like the Masked Dyer) but decked out with narrative finery from some oriental "history." Whatever the case, Borges exploded History through parody (infamy) and hyperbole. But he was up to other things as well.

Not only did he relativize the historical event by assuming a different perspective but he also introduced, implicitly, a notion which would later become central to an interpretation of his work as a whole: the notion of conjecture. Since an event belongs to History only when it gets recorded, or written down (this is what separates the historical event from one that isn't), the writing itself becomes History. There is no History but the recorded.

This axiom makes it understandable why, for Borges, History is conjectural. If every historical text is *a* text, then there is not one History (which would postulate the existence of a final, single, canonical text) but rather a series of written texts. Each one of them offers a possible version of what actually took place in reality. Each one of them only exists as conjecture.

View of Dawn in the Tropics does not attempt to reconstruct the History of Cuba, a task which has been taken on, among others, by Fernando Portuondo. It attempts something more modest: to reconstruct the process of the writing of Cuban History.

> History says: "The colored people began to nurture among themselves the goal of imitating the Haitians. The insurrections of the blacks in the sugar mills were more and more frequent, but they lacked unity and leadership."
>
> Legend has it that the largest uprising was crushed in time because the governor himself found out about it when, during his rounds, he heard some blacks talking in a hut outside the town walls.

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> In reality, as often happens, the conspirators were betrayed by a neighbor who lived in the house on whose roof the conspirators would meet.
>
> All the conspirators were hanged.

The text moves from History to legend and from there to "reality." History, the writing of History by a historian undoubtedly prejudiced (he speaks of "the blacks"), postulates an anonymous uprising. Legend seeks to determine a hero and fixes on the governor, a sort of Harun Al-Rashid keeping tabs on his people. But "in reality," the vignette offers a third solution, more credible for avoiding the abstraction of History and the personification of legend. The anonymous neighbor functions precisely on the level on which the book itself is written. There are no names or dates, but it is "real," with the concrete reality of a character from that fiction which is the script of history.

So History as an independent reality doesn't exist. Writing History exists, and this book is secretly dedicated to that theme. In order to bring this scriptwriting out, Cabrera Infante makes use of the common techniques of another kind of writing: the cinematic. The book consists of a series of shots (views, one might say) of a reality, that of the island of Cuba, which is presented simultaneously in its permanent space and its recurrent time. Each view (each vignette) offers a privileged moment in this series. Many are narrative and are equivalent to the usual shots in fictional cinema. Successive sentences join up to form a narrative complete in itself, although for its total effect it must be spliced in with the rest of the views. But there is a whole series of shots that use a different method. They begin with a still shot (an engraving, a photograph), they describe the moment in its immobility, and then (as in films) they animate it for a few moments before returning it to the freeze frame.

> He's falling, behind the hill: the gray arm raised without anger against the white sky where there's a whiter sun which you now can't see, the gray hand, the dark-gray forearm, the black rifle next to, stuck to, fused with the pale-gray chest with the black stain on one side, without pain or surprise because they didn't give him time, without knowing that he's falling on the black grass, without ever knowing that they'll see him fall again and again, like this; he hasn't yet fallen but he is falling because a black shoulder, the black-gray-black pants (there's no longer any color, no olive-green uniform nor red-and-black band nor blue eyes: all hues depend on the eternal, leveling sunlight), the gray neck, the gray-gray face, the whole gray-black left side is faded, fading and vanished, leaning toward the black

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> earth and death forever: the volley or the single shot wasn't heard but the impact is felt and he will fall as long as man exists and they will see him falling when eyes look at him and they will not forget him as long as there is memory.

The counterpoint between the photograph (black and gray) and the colorful reality which it evokes, between the stillness of the moment, forever caught by the camera, and the unstoppable swiftness of the real event, is what matters here. The verbs (to fall, to fade) allude to a dynamic situation that now only exists, although once fully existed, in its freezing; that now exists because once it was frozen. History, such as the photograph revealed (in the technical sense) by the vignette, is also a frozen reality.

Another vignette illustrates the process of *framing* which historical writing implies. That is: how the camera, like the vignette, selects and privileges a fragment of space, and thus redesigns it, adding meaning or feeling to it.

> In the photograph you can see the head comandante entering the capital in a jeep. Next to him is another comandante and you can see the driver and another member of the escort. In the background the crowd cheers the heroes. But the photographer had a touch of foresight. As he didn't know the third comandante, he cut him out of the picture when cropping it. A few months later the third comandante was in jail, accused of treason and sentenced to thirty years in prison. All who had anything to do with him were immediately branded as suspects, and the historians proceeded to erase his name from the books. Ahead of his time, the photographer did not have to look for his photograph to cut it accordingly. That's what you call historical guesswork.

The writing of History, then, and not History itself: an abstract being whose godly features are altered every day according to the casual iconography provided by the press. But this book of vignettes has nothing to do with the daily press. What the book is about is the repetition of situations, characters, tragedies. This repetition—Indians massacred by the Spaniards, Blacks slaved by Creoles, revolutionaries tortured by the establishment (any establishment)—does not imply the circularity of History but the circularity of the writing of History.

The text of the book opens with a description of Cuba. The end of the first vignette is explicit: "There's the island, still coming out between the ocean and the gulf: there it is. . . ." The last vignette completes the sentence:

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> And it always be there. As someone once said, that long, sad, unfortunate island will be there after the last Indian and after the last Spaniard and after the last African and after the last American and after the last of the Cubans, surviving all disasters, eternally washed over by the Gulf Stream: beautiful and green, undying, eternal.

The writing of History (if not History itself) shows here its circularity. As in *Finnegans Wake*, the beginning and the end of this book consists of a single phrase. Repetitive time, space closing into itself, the writing of History produces a whole, tight, unified text. For the believers in Utopias, this time may seem negative, dark, destructive. But for those who believe in reality (and in the fiction of reality, and in the writing of that fiction), this time is not negative at all. It is the only time we really know, or can talk about: the time of writing which, like the island, is always beautiful and green and eternal.

EMIR RODRÍGUEZ MONEGAL

(Translated from the Spanish by David Pritchard and the author.)

THE WORLD OF WASP

THE STORIES OF JOHN CHEEVER. Alfred A. Knopf. $15.

The deceptively modest self-portrait that John Cheever fashions in the preface to his newly collected *Stories* ("Naive, provincial . . . almost always clumsy") well accords with our customary sense of Cheever as a natural, as a self-reliant and largely homespun historian of the manners and morals of the upper middle class. Despite the elegant contrivances and highly figured language that have always called plain attention to Cheever's exertions as a stylist in both his novels and his shorter pieces, Cheever's image of himself as the innocent realist is a tempting one to maintain.

One principal advantage is that it allows us to suspend our moral exasperation with Cheever's dreamy and passive characters by shifting

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the blame for their indecision and frustration away from the author. We assign it instead to the world of WASP custom that Cheever renders with such sympathy and exactitude in his early portraits of prewar Manhattan, and, later on, in his sketches of the disguised Westchester suburb known in his fiction as Shady Hill. More abused than abusive, the usual Cheever hero tends to be, like Ralph Whittemore in "The Pot of Gold," a "prisoner of his schemes and expectations"; the unsuspecting and ironic casualty of his single decisive conviction in life, "an uncompromising loyalty," as Cheever puts it, "to the gentle manners of the middle class."

As a result, we can attribute the loneliness of the Cheever hero to a world of conventions no longer adequate to experience but still impossible to break away from (a "rigid script," as Cheever calls it in "Metamorphoses"). Such a reading shores up our sense of the Cheever hero as the hapless or pathetic victim, different in tone from the victim in Jewish fiction perhaps, but still consistent with the approved modernist hero at odds, like Conrad's isolatoes, with a world of received customs and beliefs.

The first real attempt to canonize Cheever came with the publication of *Falconer* in 1977, for *Falconer* seemed, on the face of it at least, to place Cheever securely in the kind of modern tradition that justifies inaction as an indictment of society; that exploits, in short, the familiar figure of the prison to express the way culture captures and confines the self. But if Falconer prison was the key to Cheever's triumph, it was not so much because it served a vision of modern life as a life of imprisonment and isolation, but because Cheever used it to measure confinement as our ruling notion about ourselves. A metaphor about a metaphor rather than a metaphor about life, Cheever's prison suggested that the real function of confinement was to produce, as its necessary yield and support, the notion of freedom.

If we inquire into the arguments and architecture of the *Stories*, here, too, we will find a very different kind of drama from the Christian and modernist one that supposedly liberates and resurrects Farragut as he emerges from a shroud outside Falconer's walls. There is, after all, no overwhelming burden or hypocrisy in the confinements that the quotidian world places on Cheever's characters in the *Stories* (imagine Ned Merrill in "The Swimmer" making his neighborly rounds without the obligatory drinks he takes at each house along his way), for it is a drama of accommodation to the duties of daily life that is being played out.

It is probably even inaccurate to say that character in itself is

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Cheever's particular focus. For all the richness of incident, each affair, each frustration, each hero is a variation on another. Sometimes whole dramatic situations are virtual contractions or extensions of one another, as in "The Music Teacher" and "The Country Husband"; sometimes mirror images, as in "The Cure" and "The Housebreaker of Shady Hill." In fact, character and scene alike are memorable less for themselves than for the particular angle of vision they provide on a world they behold in common.

The moral corollary, of course, is that Cheever's characters are the decided instruments of circumstance, unable and unwilling not only to act but even to react, whether to a pathetic rival in "The Season of Divorce," or to the regular provocation of a burned dinner and a sour wife in "The Music Teacher." One of the most irritating examples in all of the *Stories* comes at the start of "The Country Husband," when Francis Weed returns to Shady Hill dazed and battered by a near calamitous crash landing on a flight home to Idlewild from a business trip. When the exhausted Weed tries to tell his brawling kids and distracted wife about it, no one even hears him—the husband and father, alas, victimized by the very household he has created. But what looks like a refusal to engage moral questions by retreating into the fantastic turns out to be an attempt to determine what is decisive in the formation of character and what is not.

Even "The Enormous Radio" holds a more problematic meaning than its rather weak moral patina suggests. Though Jim and Irene Wescott have bought a new radio for the pleasure of listening to music, the mysterious machine forces them instead to listen in on the sad and sometimes brutal private lives of their neighbors, and appears to jolt them both into the discovery of passions and pains of their own. What is shocking about the story's final scene, however, is not the substance of Irene's sudden moral attack on her husband for his past sins, but that the imperturbable and virtually blank Irene (at the start of the tale she has "a wide, fine forehead upon which nothing at all had been written") has suddenly acquired the abusive rhetoric of intimacy from overhearing the lives of others.

Hence the energy of plot in a Cheever story lies less with what we think of as the customary driving force of short fiction—the moral dilemma, the emotional tension of a conflict to be pressured or resolved—and more with engaging the reader in a wish to uncoil the enigmatic structure of motivation and desire, to track down the origins of identity through the names and images that determine it. This is the privileged obsession of Charlie Mallory in "The Geometry of Love,"

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an engineer whose marital squabbles and "lost . . . sense of reality" impel him to "decipher," for each significant moment in his life, "the chain of contingencies that had detonated the scene," and thus to express in miniature Cheever's own enterprise in the *Stories* at large.

So in a single strategy that combines his lyric gift for the particular with his visionary inclination for what is abstract and paradigmatic, Cheever focuses not on character as a thing in itself, but on what he calls in "The Sorrows of Gin" "the literal symbols of life"—a familiar object or a scene from the past—by which a particular character finds his own relation to life concentrated in a particular image or situation. "The Lowboy" is a prime example of how an object allows Cheever both to evoke a world and take apart its mechanisms in a single stroke. Like those haunting summer houses in the more familiar stories in the volume, the old and once forgotten piece of family furniture that gives "The Lowboy" its title raises powerful memories of childhood and primitive rivalry in two brothers, memories deriving from a scene or object like those of Proust's *madeleine* or like the symptoms of Freud's hysterics. The *Stories* might even be arranged in terms of the "symbols" or situations that locate and define the self from tale to tale—the allure of Broadway for Evarts Malloy in "O City of Broken Dreams"; the ancestral summer place in "Goodbye, My Brother" or "The Summer Farmer"; the moving van that becomes an icon of humiliation and flight in "The Scarlet Moving Van"; even a particular day in a family's history like the one that gives "The Day the Pig Fell into the Well" its title, and that allows a fractured and embittered collection of relatives to reaffirm its stamina as a unit by recalling, from various points of view, the circumstances that surrounded the decisive event.

If there is melancholy and hesitation in Cheever's world, there is, however, no anxiety in our recognizably modern or Jewish sense, no struggle for self-mastery or coherence because life is already coherent as it is. The inability of Cheever's characters to take action or even to feel anxiety or rage about their circumstances is not, then, so much a moral vision with problems as it is a vision beyond or apart from the moral as we normally conceive it. For Cheever, culture precedes the individual and subordinates him to it—makes him possible in the first place—through the constitutive power of the "symbols" it supplies (thus Victor and Theresa Mackenzie in "The Children," who wander from situation to situation with no identities apart from those they can assume by attaching themselves, for love and money alike, to a wealthy family or an ailing estate). The Cheever of the *Stories* has a less coherent nostalgia for the natural than the pastoral Cheever of the

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Wapshot novels, and so a less coherent notion of culture itself as evil. Indeed, the "moral chain of being" that Cheever identifies in the preface as one of the "constants" he means to find in life is most profitably understood as a notion of the "chain" of "mores" that links the moments of life to one another, and that provides whatever sense life may hold for Cheever's characters. Rather than rail against the "chain" as though it represses nature and desire, Cheever prefers instead to analyze the way the "chain" of culture produces what thoughts and feelings we have. To characterize Cheever's project in this way not only suggests his links with James and Hawthorne before him, but also his less manifest links with postmodernist contemporaries like Borges or Pynchon. Despite its realist premises, after all, Cheever's art, too, is in search of a means to represent, not life itself, but the representations that structure and determine our experience of life. By remaining at the same time resolute in its obligation to render that experience in the sympathetic terms of the particular individual and his relation to the quotidian, however, Cheever's fiction wins for itself the additional distinction of maintaining two apparently antithetical modes—one realist, one antirealist or surfictional—in an equilibrium that would collapse in less knowing hands.

PERRY MEISEL

POETRY AS DISCOURSE

A HISTORY OF MODERN POETRY. By David Perkins. Belknap Press. $6.95.

"A work of art," wrote Ezra Pound, "need not contain any statement of a political or of a social or of a philosophical conviction, but it nearly always implies one." The same holds true for literary histories. David Perkins's *History* is no nightmare, but it rests in a certain methodological slumber from which readers may feel the need to awaken. The volume's format uses the devices of past literary

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histories to establish its authority, and thus to anesthetize the reader's critical sense. The title, unlike modern poetry, is reassuringly conventional. How could one object to "A History of Modern Poetry"? The table of contents, unlike *The Waste Land* or the *Cantos*, adheres strictly to a chronological conception of history. There is a disturbing irony latent here, one which is fundamental to the limits of this narrative. All the terms of the title, "History," "Modern," and "Poetry," are concepts that the writing of this century has taken special pains to interrogate. The ideology implicit in each of these words has been rendered problematic at best by the very literature Perkins hopes to chronicle.

The book often seems documentary and encyclopedic in intent rather than interpretive. It is a fine work for reference, concisely introducing the careers of over one hundred poets, and providing thumbnail sketches of every literary movement from the Celtic twilight to the New York avant-garde with commendable precision. In the preface we are told, however, that "One fundamental purpose of this book is to go behind the interpretation of modern literary history that has been current for the last forty years." Exactly what this interpretation is we are never told. Perkins's alternative is hardly subversive. In his second sentence he accepts the view that modernism was "the formative period during which the romantic traditions of the past were abandoned or transformed and a major new literature created." Aside from being commonplace, this generalization implies the critical method governing the whole book. That method is to envision poetry as an autonomous development whose history can be told apart from other contexts. To borrow Michel Foucault's nomenclature, poetry is for Perkins a distinct "discursive formation." Unlike Foucault, however, Perkins stubbornly resists analyzing the interplay of poetry's discourse with those of politics, economics, history, culture. These fields are touched upon tangentially; he is especially aware of how the economics of publication, about which Pound complained so loudly, affect the production of literature and the values it can disseminate. Whenever accounting for a change in poetic practice, however, Perkins almost invariably invokes a theory of poetic history which gives primary analytic prestige to the poet's relations with his precursors.

Perkins has dedicated his book to Walter Jackson Bate, whose *Burden of the Past and the English Poet* was dedicated to Perkins. Bate's thesis has been elaborated notoriously by Harold Bloom, whose work is wonderfully inspired by a Freudian Muse. But Perkins's use of the Bate/Bloom reading of poetic history fails to satisfy, for it restricts poetic genesis to a matter of internecine literary warfare, conducted in a

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distant Olympus of Strong Poets. In such a schema a poet's deeply felt reactions against certain trends in cultural history can be subsumed in a narrow struggle for priority and immortality in an ahistorical cosmos. Bate and Bloom have immensely enriched our understanding of the problems of poetic creation, but in their method is the danger that socio-political issues will be seen ephemeral.

Thus when Perkins writes his section on "The Widening of Subject Matter" in modern poetry, he rejects historical explanations. For him "the immediate cause of this development lies in the reaction of poets to their late-Victorian predecessors, not in the new experiences and perceptions modern poets may be supposed to have acquired." He acknowledges that "Profound alterations in the conditions of human life were occurring," but finds the real cause of modern poetic treatments of the city, nature, and the individual to be "The conventions that dominated English and American poetry at the turn of the century." This reading remains well within the mainstream of formalist interpretation current for the last forty years. What is unacceptable in Perkins's description is his separation of the content, the implied convictions, of these conventions from their form. The poets of modernity were in fact striving to articulate profound objections to the culture of their time. When these poets did turn against their poetic fathers, the impulse was as much a matter of philosophy and politics as of technique and style.

A case in point is Perkins's treatment of the modernist revolution against the poets of the "Georgian Anthology," the "nonmodernist English poets who became known just before, during, and after the First World War or who did their best work during this period." A line is drawn from the origin, which is romanticism, through the reaction of Victorianism, down to the double reaction of modernism, and poetic change is mapped chiefly according to this aesthetic trajectory. Perkins's Georgians come belatedly, only to find that the tropes of nature have been exhausted by better poets. The only history they seem to know is that of poetic conventions. This belatedness, argues Perkins, not the history of the use and perception of nature by urban, capitalist societies of the nineteenth century, explains Georgian vacuousness.

Perkins slips into the Georgian reading of romanticism because it is required by his theoretical model, which postulates that attitudes towards nature in poetry are determined by past poetic treatments of nature. Such treatments are, on the contrary, reflective of what Foucault has called the "episteme" of a given age, which determines what an object of knowledge like "nature" can be, what its use is, and who

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can speak of it with authority. Shelley found no consolation at Mont Blanc, but "an awful scene,/Where Power in likeness of the Arve comes down/From the ice-gulfs that gird his secret throne." The banality of Georgian nature has less to do with an inability to best the precursors than with the place of nature in the ideology of a bourgeois society. The sentimental vision of nature drained it of its awful power to undermine the validity of the worlds that had been shaped from it, allowing society to establish for poetry a safe area for recreation while the real business of creating monetary value out of coal and iron progressed.

Eliot, on the other hand, did not believe that "Keats, or Shelley, or Wordsworth, or Tennyson can be incriminated in the production of the Georgian Anthology." For him Georgian inspiration "is not the shattered Keats but the solid and eternal Podsnap himself. This party represents, in fact, the insurgent middle-class." Eliot's aristocratic mask rises up in horror before this insurgency of "Regular Hours, Regular Wages, Regular Pensions, and Regular Ideas." The middle class is the Order of Things produced by nineteenth-century civilization. Eliot had read his Henry Adams, and knew that in an entropic universe every accomplishment of order came at the cost of leaving behind a land of waste, amidst which were to be found the broken images of real cultural force. With the Georgians, culture became a parody of itself, a farce of historical repetition. Against this leveling of human energy the modernists, particularly Yeats, Joyce, Pound, and Eliot, directed their mock-professorial fury. Casting his glance down at the universities, journalism, criticism, at the "General Reading Public," Eliot spoke his pithy judgment: "there is no culture here." The failure of the Georgians is the failure of Eliot's favorite category of the damned: the neutrals, the middle class of souls, the fence sitters between good and evil whom Dante scourged and who form the crowd of *The Waste Land*. It is the creeping entropy of the Georgians, their limbo of indifference, that brings on Eliot's wrath. (Of course Eliot's Georgians are at this point as much a fabulation as Perkins's, but to a different purpose.) If the Georgians indeed modeled themselves after the romantics, it was only through a misreading which defused the threat romantic poetry could pose to the settled sensibility of the middle class. The posture of aristocracy one finds in so much of "high modernism" is a counter-misreading, an attempt to establish a new authorized canon to attack the mediocrity of the declining West.

The political questions arising out of modern poetry, questions about the distribution of economic and intellectual power, can be

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considered today outside the terms of the heated arguments that blazed from 1914 till Pound's death. Our only other history of modern poetry, Hugh Kenner's *Pound Era*, evades these questions with spectacular finesse, though giving at the same time a more imaginative, if less accurate, history of the period than Perkins. The integral role which modernism saw poetry playing in the task of reevaluating Western social, political, and economic questions has been trapped by sterile categorizations of the Left and the Right, or displaced and avoided in a critical practice too formalist in its concerns and too comfortable in its professional attitude. As Christopher Caudwell wrote some forty years ago: "It is impossible to understand modern poetry unless we understand it historically—in motion. We can only bring back dead formulae from a study of poetry as static 'works of art,' as something frozen and ossified. This is particularly true where poetry is the organic product of a whole society violently in motion."

The theory of history underlying much of modern poetry assumes that definite judgments of value must be made: culture is not simply a catalogue of what has been said by the great. Poetry, Pound declared, is didactic in a special sense. The systems of allusion in modern poetry follow this theoretical program for cultural renewal, as do the reading lists contained in the *Guide to Kulchur* or *The Sacred Wood*. Modernist poetic criticism assembles its histories of poetry in direct relation to the problems of modern social and political life, as well as with an eye on technical usefulness. Thus a history of modern poetry should probably begin with Dante. Dante was the master poet for the moderns because he dared to judge his culture in his poetry, and he did so with an unparalleled honesty, explicitness, and beauty. He offered a model for a poetic practice still powerful enough to make the text a shaping force in the socio-political world. Poets choose their precursors not simply to escape belatedness, but to promulgate thereby a set of values extending through history and the poetry that informs it. Every modernism is a canon with its own principles and beliefs, stated or implied. One may find the idiosyncracy, subjectivity, or ideology of some of these canons unpalatable, but they at least risk themselves by asserting the importance of selective critical understanding to any reassessment of history and modernity. Scholastic objectivity, even in the safe guise of a historical survey, may be caught in the limbo where neutrality is worse than partisanship.

GREG JAY

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ACTS OF TRANSLATION

MEN OF MAIZE. By Miguel Angel Asturias. Translated by Gerald Martin. Delacorte Press. $10.

A PLAN FOR ESCAPE. By Adolfo Bioy-Casares. Translated by Suzanne Jill Levine. E.P. Dutton. $7.95.

One remarkable thing about these two books is that they are not only translations in the form in which they reach us but that they are also translations by nature. Translations in the broadest sense, I mean. *A Plan for Escape* is another of Bioy-Casares's developments of H.G. Wells's story, "The Island of Dr. Moreau," and Asturias's *Men of Maize* is the Guatemalan author's culminating rendition of the Mayan myths he studied and began translating while doing graduate work at the Sorbonne. Both novels, therefore, translate in the literal sense from one culture to another: the first from Edwardian England into pre-Peron Argentina and the second from pre-Columbian Mayan (by way of French) into the contemporary Spanish of Mezoamerica.

What's more, both novels are concerned with peculiar human activities which are, properly, acts of translation: *A Plan for Escape* with the gathering of sensory information and its translation through the brain into interpretations of reality and *Men of Maize* with the filtering of random social, natural, and economic data through the sorter of legend which translates that data into memorable and therefore useful explanations of phenomena. And beyond that, both novels show the process of translation as exactly that—as *process*—in which the original "text" is in constant motion of interpretation as it develops within the necessarily progressive but not necessarily improving action of the mind upon its data. In this latter sense, neither novel is concerned with bookish translation, which all too often has come to signify nit-picking completion, finality.

This fundamental, even epistemological similarity between the two novels is all the more remarkable in that the books themselves—both in their individuality and in their history—are so remarkably different. *Men of Maize* is Asturias's second novel, written after his famous *El Señor Presidente*, and along with that earlier book closes the opening movement of his career by fulfilling his two principal techniques: political criticism and mythic reconstruction, the first to

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gradually assume ascendency and lead him into thoroughly committed and completely disastrous works such as his notorious "banana trilogy" and the latter into a novel like *Mulata*, which is so completely a mythic reconstruction that it is almost unintelligible to the uninitiated. For most people, these two early works are also Asturias's best; and now with *Men of Maize* in English long after the appearance here of other lesser works by him, we can definitely say that *Men of Maize* is not only Asturias's masterpiece but a masterpiece for all of us.

The plot device out of which Asturias spins his lengthy novel is a conflict so basic as to reverberate in almost every culture: opposed to men who grow corn as the staple of life come the men who grow it as a livelihood, calling into question the cult of corn as a simple matter of economics. Obviously, this conflict involves the entire history of Latin America but because Asturias had not yet entered his *engagé* period, which he began with *Strong Wind*, the first volume of his trilogy, this conflict is only the foundation on which he builds his mythic structure.

At the novel's opening, the leader of the agricultural society, Gaspar Ilóm, is urged by the voices of the earth to fight off the materialists and when he does he is abandoned by his wife and eventually killed. More from the flight of the woman, who becomes a mythic figure of lost love and mother earth, than from the socio-economic struggle, Asturias elaborates a sprawling narrative which takes up successive adventures of men in search of themselves by searching for the women who have abandoned them. Some of these searches are desperate and pathetic—like the quest of a blind man who regains his sight and goes off in search of his wife only to realize that he will never recognize her because he has never seen her—while others lead to comic, slapstick events—like the long joke about the two men who buy a barrel of booze in order to sell it but drink it up themselves, always exchanging the same six pesos in payment until they are left drunk, in jail, and unable to explain how the barrel became empty without their earning more than six pesos.

Looked at in this way, *Men of Maize* is abruptly episodic, nonsequential in any linear notion of time or space; but the novel is in fact rigorously faithful to its guiding principle, boldly announced in the epigraph, which for some reason has been left in the original Spanish:

> *Aquí la mujer,*
> *yo el dormido*
>
> (Here the woman,
> I the sleeper)

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I say "rigorously faithful" and I mean it provocatively because the consistent charge against this novel is formlessness. Judged by the standards of conventional novel writing—whatever they may be—this novel is formless, just as *The Waste Land* is formless when judged by the standards of *Paradise Lost.* But Asturias has been as true to his sources in the most ample sense of that word as Eliot was to his, and *Men of Maize* is a great turning point in the history of Latin American literature, as Ariel Dorfman pointed out so many years ago, because it is the first major translation of Mayan myth into the literature and culture which had rejected it, first as pagan and therefore objectionable and second as primitive and therefore unworthy. In a way, it ought to be easier for us, with our background in works like *The Golden Bough* and *The Waste Land,* to see that Asturias's achievement demands new norms and that if the great poem in English of the first part of the twentieth century can be worked on the lines of European and Oriental myth and sectioned on the technological principles of film, so can a great novel of the same period in Latin America be worked on the lines of equally venerable New World mythology and the agricultural aesthetic of developing repetition found in Guatemalan textiles. In other words, *Men of Maize* raises the most profound questions about culture and art, not only about the society it presents but also in the reader who confronts that society. No wonder it is such an unsettling, iconoclastic book.

In contrast to this "hot" text, which outrages our sensibilities and aesthetics, Bioy-Casares's "cool" novel, *A Plan for Escape,* politely refuses to disturb us as it grows ever inward with a complexity that is the evident nature of its narrative rather than the apparent hazard of Asturias's narration. *Men of Maize* embroils us in a novel that is literally and intentionally *con-fusion*; *A Plan for Escape* confuses us with a slim mystery that is monomaniacally single, ostentatiously planned. Looked at together, the one book offers the lavish raw material of Latin America, the other an epitome of its refinement. Inevitably, Bioy-Casares seems less "Latin" to us than Asturias.

Bioy-Casares is a close friend of Borges and the two have collaborated on many fictions, including film treatments. Bioy-Casares is clearly the lesser writer, yet one of his novellas, *The Invention of Morel,* is the basis for one of Borges's most important aesthetic manifestos. In his preface to that book, Borges suggested a theory of plot construction which he developed in his essay on narrative and magic. The theory is quite simply a denial of psychology as a basis for fiction because psychology admits of all behaviors and explanations;

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instead, the writer is urged to make plots that function with the deliberate cause and effect, at a distance, of the magic whereby a pin stuck in doll in one place kills someone in another. This aesthetic of what Borges refers to as "inlaid" details has largely been ignored here because *The Invention of Morel* has been ignored. Nevertheless, this theory is the basis for any clear understanding of the revolutionary force of Borges's writings and for the elegant formalism of both his and Bioy-Casares's fictions, which Borges has called perfect fulfillments of the theory—in implicit rejection of Asturias and all writers like him.

Both *Morel* and *A Plan for Escape* are plotted in the tight manner of mystery stories and both of them depend on willful aberrations of the senses for their mystery. (Significantly, Rimbaud is alluded to in *A Plan for Escape.*) Working in line with Dr. Moreau's experiments in Wells's story, a secondary character in each novella (Morel in one, Castel in the other) devises ways to alter man's perceptions of the world and, thus, to alter that world itself. Both novellas are science fictions, born of Berkeley's *esse est percipi* by way of H.G. Wells and clearly reflect Borges's thematic presentations of time and space. What makes them notable, however, is the convoluted method of presenting the mystery so that everything in *Plan,* for example, is called into question, not least of all the reader's perception of what "really" happened.

The plot of *Plan* is simple enough: a young man, Henri Nevers, is exiled for a period to an island that makes up the Devil's Island complex, apparently because of some misdemeanor in the family business. Nevers longs to get away in order to join his fiancée in Paris, and his narrative takes the form of letters to his uncle who rather unsympathetically and coolly edits them into the text we read. What's more, the people Nevers talks to don't reveal themselves clearly and, besides, he's ill—all of which makes his perception of what is going on as well as our perception of him and it unverifiable. The more Nevers tries to understand what the strange Castel is doing, the more evidence he translates into explanation, the less he really understands. The fact that Castel, as we ultimately learn, is performing radical surgery—appropriately bloodless and discretely unspecified in the text—on men's sensory apparatus in order to make their nutshell prison seem an unbounded world simply confirms Bioy's repeated indication that while we can only read the world through the translation of our senses, those senses are unreliable in rendering that world.

Sophisticated, brittle, witty, and allusive, Bioy's novel has been robbed of some of the shock it must have had when it was originally published in 1945 during the Nazi atrocities—which it suggests by the

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most delicate and distanced means: rather like a technician handling radioactive isotopes with elaborately articulated forceps through a protective barrier. The content of his book is made safe for us, sterilized as it were, by the complicated technique, and in its remoteness, the experience of reading *A Plan for Escape* is something like the experience of reading Hawthorne's stories; but Bioy could not write of his tales, as Hawthorne could write of his, that they "have none of the abstruseness of idea, or obscurity of expression, which mark the written communication of a solitary mind with itself. They never need translation." Bioy's does seem a solitary mind in communication with itself, and the translation his fiction requires may be what we have come to expect of the act of reading in the time since Hawthorne's hypothetical censure. In contrast, the stuff of Asturias's book still seems the exuberance of nature. Complicated technique applied to sprawling substance was to be the direction novelists of the so-called boom in Latin American fiction would all take, while the delirious language of Asturias was only sometimes to be their medium, indicating, perhaps, that while Asturias's huge book is a great novel in itself and a major step within the development of Latin American fiction, Bioy's thin one belongs more to the history of that form.

And what of the translations of these translations? They are both good, as we have come to expect of recent translations from Latin America. I admire the way that Gerald Martin has dealt with the text quite freely in places so as to write it into English, and I especially admire his persistent elimination of the quite natural subordination of the Spanish in order to get an English that streams in confluence with its subject. Suzanne Jill Levine, who looks to becoming the Constance Garnett of Latin American fiction, has done a clean job but her "Translator's Preface" to *A Plan for Escape*, like her preface to *Cobra*, disturbs me more than any questions about her text (such as why she interpreted the book's more general Spanish title to include the specific article with which it appears in English). These prefaces, which really have nothing to do with her translations as such, are branded by a medieval insistence on "levels" of meaning, curiously deposited commas, and an embarrassing lapse in referring to Bioy-Casares's "reactions against the horrors of Fascisim and Nazism which then shook the world, including his own country, Argentina." (One thought the world had included Argentina for quite some time now.) I don't know whether such lapses are tactics or a want of tact, but they certainly cause the reader to wonder, beyond the question of translators who

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quite naturally pretend to criticism, about the very nature of the translator as writer. And once I raise that question I again raise the question of the reader as translator, finding myself back in the content of Asturias's novel, perplexed by the complication of Bioy's.

RONALD CHRIST

NATHALIE SARRAUTE

NATHALIE SARRAUTE. By Gretchen Rous Besser. Twayne Publishers. $11.95.

This is the first English language critical study of the highly regarded French author Nathalie Sarraute. It offers a fine survey of Sarraute's novels and plays and a solid explication of her theory of fiction, but the critical ideas on which the study is based are full of the modern pieties: the illusion that the modern novel is more "self-conscious" than the nineteenth and that it alone has a monopoly on "reality," and the obsessive need to assert its innovation and superiority to the past. The use of the word "reality" shows the author's dependence on the vocabulary she rejects; so too her dependence on critical dichotomies (objective/subjective, real/imaginary) that she claims Sarraute's novels deny. Backed into a corner by these contradictions, the author finally asserts the existence of "universal themes"—a phrase that would make Sarraute cringe.

The effect of the study then is to transpose Sarraute's novels back into a nineteenth-century mode of understanding. Analyses identify the relation between characters ("The terms 'aunt,' 'uncle,' 'cousin' seldom occur within the text," she writes of *Martereau*, "They are used here for the sake of convenience.") and tell us what episodes are "real" and what fantasized by certain characters. But this regression to nineteenth-century categories is unavoidable in most instances, since Sarraute's works are themselves based on the nineteenth-century belief in the separation between appearance and reality. Whether reality is made up

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of psychologically perceived "motives" or semiconscious tropisms seems less important than Sarraute's allegiance to the separation itself. Perhaps more than anything else, Besser's faithful textual analysis shows that Sarraute's break with the fiction of the past is not as radical in practice as it is in theory.

JULIA PREWITT BROWN

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VLADIMIR NABOKOV, who died in 1977, was world-renowned as a novelist, literary analyst, and translator.

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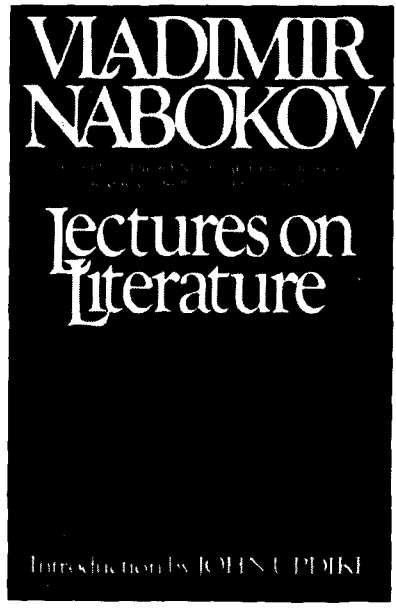

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LETTERS

In Response to Isaac Rosenfeld

EDITORS:

I am puzzled by the entry in Isaac Rosenfeld's Journal which you published (Vol. XLVII, #1, 1980): "The Man who was Twice Arrested. E.V.D. Haag. Picked up on charges of homosexual vagrancy—& on suspicion of murder. Patently false, of course. But these are the 'crimes' of which he is symbolically guilty."

Isaac's "patently false, of course" is correct: I have never engaged in, been charged with, or been "picked up" for "homosexual vagrancy," or "murder."

Why the entry? Perhaps Isaac played with the idea of a story in which "these are the crimes" of which I (as he apprehended or created me) would become "symbolically guilty." But possible fictions must not be confused with actual facts.

Ernest van den Haag

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